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ROCK-CLIMBING IN SKYE

ASHLEY P. ABRAHAM

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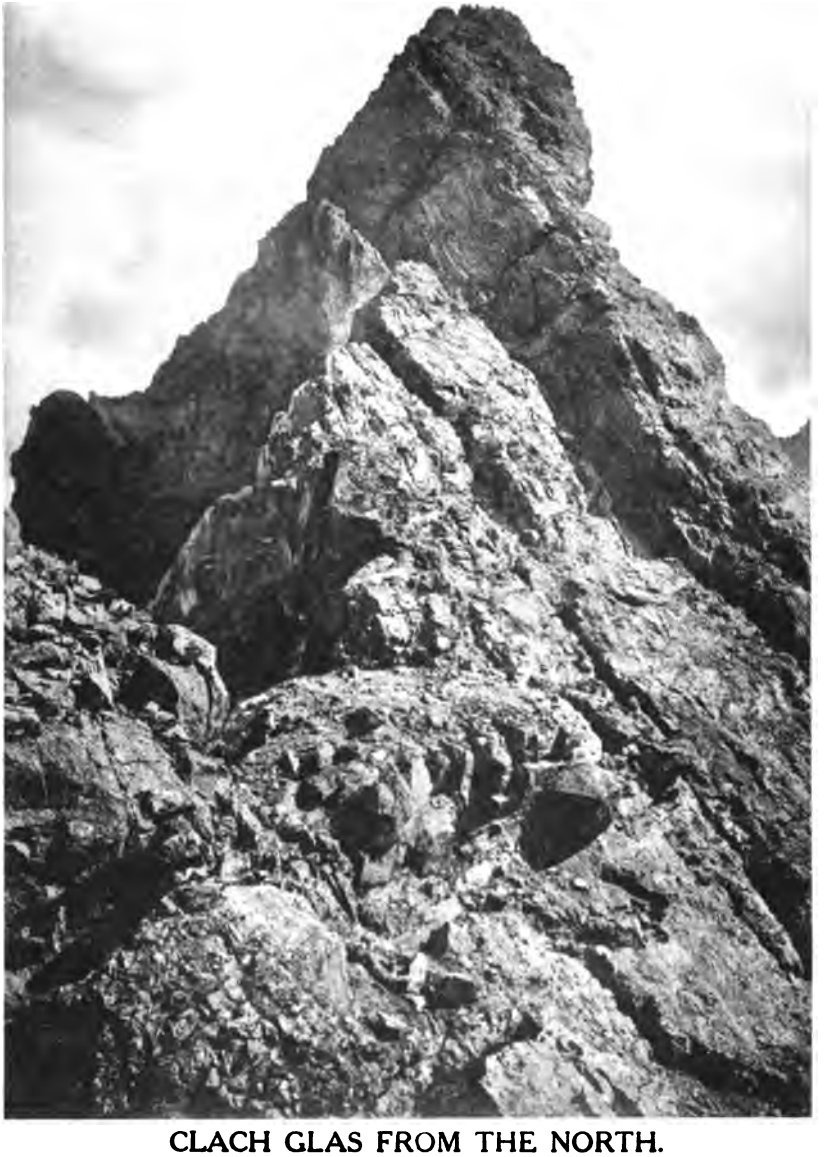

CLACH GLAS FROM THE NORTH.

ROCK-CLIMBING IN SKYE

BY

ASHLEY P. ABRAHAM

PRESIDENT OF THE [illegible]

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IN [illegible]
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A FROM THE NORTH.

ROCK-CLIMBING IN SKYE

BY

ASHLEY P. ABRAHAM
PRESIDENT OF THE FELL AND ROCK-CLIMBING CLUB
MEMBER OF THE CLIMBERS' CLUB

WITH THIRTY FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS
IN COLLOTYPE, NINE DIAGRAMS OF
THE CHIEF ROUTES, AND A MAP

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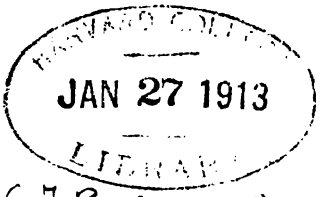

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TO

My Father and Mother

INTRODUCTION

THE mountains of Skye, the Coolin, are generally conceded to be the finest in the British Isles. In form and shapeliness, in rugged and lonely grandeur, in variety of colouring, and, above all, in their wonderful setting, they surpass all our home mountains. The views from their flanks and summits are such as cannot be seen elsewhere. The island-studded sea, stretching away to the infinite distance, and the contrasts between its ever-varying moods and the stern black mountains are, to the lover of the beautiful in nature, a source of constant delight.

But the Coolin have other claims to notice than these. Among other qualities they possess a narrow summit ridge, continuous for miles and rising to fourteen peaks of more than 3000 feet in height, the traverse of which presents all the various forms of difficulty that gladden the heart of a rock-climber. With one or two exceptions these peaks of the main ridge can only be attained by actual hand-to-hand climbing. They are mountains in the most exacting sense of the word.

Their sides for the most part are devoid of vegetation above the 1000-foot line; they are craggy and precipitous, but sufficiently broken-up and weathered for the working out of a variety

of routes up them. The rock of which they are formed is ideal for the climber's purpose—rough, firm gabbro which affords magnificent holding for both hands and feet.

As regards the rock-climbing itself it is, in my humble opinion, the finest in the British Isles. This statement ought to gather emphasis when I say that I am not a Scotsman, but a Cumbrian possessed of a great admiration for the climbs of his native fells! Disillusionment comes to us all, sooner or later. The Coolin were the first mountains I saw, outside the English Lake-land, and after my first visit, in spite of a not unnatural jealousy for the honour of my own district, they took the first place in my esteem.

This introduction would seem an appropriate place for a short consideration of things which only bear indirectly upon the subject in hand. The matter of accommodation is one that concerns the climber very closely. Sligachan Inn[1] is the centre for the Coolin, and it may be said at once that it is a capital place. Its manager, Mr. Campbell, has an excellent knowledge of the requirements of climbers, and spares no pains to make them comfortable. I remember with feelings of gratitude sundry dinners eaten long after midnight, when my party had returned wet and tired, expecting little more than the roughest and scantiest meal. From the efficient arrangements for drying wet clothes to all the comforts of a good hotel, Sligachan (in spite of being nine miles distant from its base of supplies, Portree) leaves only one thing to be desired: it might

[1] Postal address: "Sligachan Inn, Isle of Skye, N.B."

with advantage be a little nearer the mountains. It has the misfortune to be a somewhat "ex-centric centre." In other words, it is situated about an hour's walk from the mountains at the northern end of the range. The peaks at the other extremity are somewhat inaccessible, unless the climber avails himself of the rough accommodation of the shepherd's house at Glen Brittle. Arrangements are sometimes made for camping, and this is often a particularly delightful item of a climbing holiday in Skye. So much can be done from Sligachan, however, that other alternatives can be decided upon after a first visit.

The best months for a visit to Skye are May, June, and July. The weather is not always all it might be, and these months are generally the driest. The extra daylight also will be found most useful for some of the longer expeditions. Sheriff Nicolson has given fairly sound advice in the following lines :—

"If you are a delicate man
And of wetting your skin are shy,
I'd have you know, before you go,
You had better not think of Skye."

But it must not be inferred from this that fine days are unknown there. During my first visit we had three weeks of cloudless weather, when the Coolin lay out bare and glistening in the heat-haze, and the rocks became almost too hot to handle. However, it is quite a question whether cloudless weather is always desirable; there can be no doubt that when the wreaths of vapour ascend their sides and the changing effects of

light and atmosphere lend them height and dignity, the mountains are seen at their best. But the climbing is apt to suffer a little. Taken altogether the weather of Skye has been much maligned by most of those who have written about the Coolin; it should certainly never be allowed to act as a deterrent to any one contemplating a visit there.

The long journey from most of the great cities of England is often considered a drawback, but those who have once undertaken it regard it as one of the pleasures of the holiday. It has been rightly said that it takes as long to get from the south of England to Skye as it does to Switzerland; but once Glasgow is reached the two journeys cannot be compared. The route from Glasgow (Queen Street Station), by the West Highland Railway to Mallaig, and thence by steamer to Portree, is of singular beauty and interest, and one, moreover, that can be accomplished much more comfortably and economically than can that to Switzerland. This is the quickest route.

Besides, it should be borne in mind that Skye is preferred to Switzerland by many climbers who are intimate with both districts. I count myself amongst these. My memories of the Coolin are more pleasurable and lasting than those of the Alps. The happiness they have brought me has been greater; and in this I am not alone. Many there are who would rather forego for ever Switzerland than Skye; few there be who have once been there but have returned again, in spite of the journey!

The Coolin are becoming more popular every year as a centre of operations for cragsmen, but the new-comer is at a loss to know where to turn for the best climbs.

Many magazine and newspaper articles have appeared from time to time, but these are exceedingly inaccessible; indeed, after much labour has been expended in finding their exact dates, they are mostly found to be out of print. In any case, their details of the climbs have of necessity been suppressed to meet the taste of the lay reader, and, beyond the ascent of the Pinnacle Ridge, little of practical use to the rock-climber is to be found in the majority of them.

The same cannot be said of the articles that have appeared in the various Mountaineering Club Journals. Mr. Charles Pilkington's now classic article in the *Alpine Journal* induced scores of climbers to go to Skye, and was of real assistance to them when on the spot. This was published in 1880, however, and is now well-nigh unobtainable.

Since the publication of this, the Scottish Mountaineering Club has been formed, and it is to the pages of its Journal that climbers have been chiefly indebted for reliable information regarding the Coolin climbs. Its members have been responsible for the greater part of the higher and more minute development of the sport, but their writings are for the most part long since out of print. A kind-hearted possessor of one of the earlier numbers of the Journal offered it to me the other day for £2, 2s., the published price being one shilling!

The Scottish Mountaineering Club reprinted brief extracts from the various Skye articles that have appeared from time to time in their Journal, together with much useful information and short notices of some of the newer climbs. These were published, under the able editorship of Mr. W. Douglas, in the September number of 1907. Alas! this has already joined the majority; it, also, is out of print—a tribute alike to its excellence and the popularity of the district with which it deals.

Many climbs have been done amongst the Coolin which are chronicled for the first time in the present book. The claims of the new-comer have not been neglected, however, for the older ascents have been dealt with in an exhaustive manner.

The method of treatment and the general lines upon which the book is moulded are the same as those of the two companion volumes, "Rock-climbing in the English Lake District," and "Rock-climbing in North Wales." The compactness of the Skye mountains has permitted of an important improvement, however—a map, reduced from the 6-inch Ordnance Survey, but with several important names added, has been inserted.

Another addition is that of a table of pronunciations and meanings. To those who are confronted for the first time by the jumble and prodigality of letters that go to the average Gaelic word, this table ought to prove a welcome refuge. What a Scotch friend once called "the sweet simplicity of his native Gaelic" is scarcely appreciated by the average Englishman. In this con-

nection I ought perhaps to say that in the spelling of the various names I have followed the 6-inch Ordnance Survey fairly closely, the chief exception being that of the Coolin themselves. My grounds for differing in this respect will be found in the last chapter.

Following the example of the two companion volumes, a graduated list of courses has been drawn up and is here submitted, with fitting diffidence. I do not for a moment expect everybody to agree with my classification; indeed, I doubt not that much obloquy will fall to its portion. I venture to hope, however, that the climber who has done a climb but once, and on that occasion probably negotiated the difficulties wrongly, will be the loudest in his denunciation! Such has often been the case in the lists of the companion volumes.

It would be impossible to draw up a single list to meet all cases, but this under consideration is the outcome of much careful thought and a repetition of most of the climbs under varying conditions. The weather, the state of the rocks, the strength of the party, the length of one's reach and other physical peculiarities, will cause the various climbs to appear relatively easier or more difficult, as the case may be. It is perhaps worthy of mention that this list ought to be more reliable than those in the two companion volumes, because the distinction between difficulty and danger is not so troublesome. Amongst the Coolin one experiences about the same standard of difficulty as in Wales or the Lakeland, but the danger is, for two reasons,

less—because the rock is so free from vegetation and so wonderfully adapted to climbing, and because, on account of the steepness of many of the climbs, the danger is more apparent. A vertical drop of from 50 to 500 feet below the scene of operations does not conduce to carelessness!

The list starts with the Tourist Route up Sgurr nan Gillean, and proceeds, in order of difficulty, to the climb up the front of the Cioch from Corrie Lagan.

Easy Courses.

The Tourist Route, Sgurr nan Gillean.*
Blaven, by the South Ridge.*
Gully between the Fourth Pinnacle and Sgurr nan Gillean.
Gully between the First and Second Pinnacles.
First Pinnacle, from Bhasteir Corrie.
Sgurr a'Fionn Choire, from Fionn Choire.
Sgurr Alasdair, by the Great Stone Shoot.*
Ridge of Gars-bheinn and Sgurr nan Eag.
Sgurr Thuilm.
Sgurr na Banachdich, from Glen Brittle.
Am Basteir, from Bealach a'Bhasteir.
Western Ridge of Sgurr nan Gillean, by Nicolson's Chimney.
Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh, from the Ghreadaidh-Mhadaidh col.
Sgurr Sgumain, by the West Ridge.
Sgurr Sgumain, by screes from Corrie Lagan.
Ridge from Bruach na Frithe to base of North Peak of Bidein.
Sgurr Tearlach, by the Great Stone Shoot.
Sgurr Tearlach, from Coir'-uisg *viâ* the Tearlach-Mhic Choinnich col.
Ridge from Sgurr a'Mhadaidh to Sgurr Dearg.*
Sgurr Coire an Lochain, from the main ridge.
Sgurr a'Mhadaidh, by the Foxes' Rake.*
Sgurr na h'Uamha, from the Sgurr nan Gillean ridge.*

Moderate Courses.

Western Ridge of Sgurr nan Gillean, over the *Gendarme.*
Sgurr Alasdair, by the ridge from Sgurr Sgumain.
Doctor's Chimney, Sgurr nan Gillean.
Clach Glas, by Mr. Pilkington's (first ascent) route.
Blaven, from Clach Glas.
Am Basteir and Bhasteir Tooth, from Lota Corrie.*
Pinnacle Ridge of Blaven.
Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh, from Sgurr an Eadar da Coire.
Sgurr na h'Uamha, from Harta Corrie.
Right-hand (south) wall of the Corrie Banachdich Gully.
Traverse of the three peaks of Sgurr Dubh.
Traverse of Druim nan Ramh and the three peaks.*
Traverse of the four peaks of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.
Sgurr Mhic Choinnich, traverse from Bealach Coire Lagan.
The Pinnacle Route.*
Western Buttress of Sgurr Sgumain.
Jammed Block Chimney, Sgurr nan Gillean.
Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh, by chimney from Coire a'Ghreadaidh.
Traverse of Clach Glas.*
The Window Buttress, Coire Banachdich.
Summit Gully, Sgurr an Fheadain.
Second Pinnacle, from Bhasteir Corrie.
Sgurr a'Fionn Choire, by South Buttress.
South-east Face of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh (South Peak).
The Cioch, by Dr. Collie's Route.*
First Pinnacle, from Coire Riabhach (by route mentioned on p. 41).
West Face of Clach Glas.
Western Gully, Precipice of Sron na Ciche.
Consolation Gully, Clach Glas.
Knight's Peak, from Bhasteir Corrie.
The Cioch, *viâ* the Cioch Gully.
Eastern Buttress Route, Precipice of Sron na Ciche.
Subsidiary Gully, Knight's Peak.
Northern Buttress of Sgurr Sgumain.
Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh, Coruisk Face.*
Left-hand (North) wall of Corrie Banachdich Gully.
Sgurr Mhic Choinnich, by buttress from Coire Lagan.

Difficult Courses.

Inaccessible Pinnacle, by its eastern arête.*
Gully between the Second and Third Pinnacles, Sgurr nan Gillean.
Eastern Gully, Precipice of Sron na Ciche (turning two lower pitches).
Inaccessible Pinnacle, by its short (western) side.
Coire Banachdich Gully.
Tearlach-Dubh Gap, from south to north.
King's Chimney, Sgurr Mhic Choinnich.
Spur of Sgurr an Fheadain.
The Castles (South Peak), from Lota Corrie.
Waterpipe Gully (skirting sundry pitches).
Sgurr Coire an Lochain, north face climb.
Tearlach-Dubh Gap, from north to south.
Forked Chimney, Sgurr nan Gillean.
Bhasteir Tooth, Lota Corrie Face.*
North-west Face of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh (North Peak).
Bhasteir Nick Gully.
North Chimney, Bhasteir Tooth.
Deep Chimney, Sgurr nan Gillean.
North-west Face of Sgurr Alasdair (Dr. Collie's route).*
Sligachan Gully (direct, or by Parallel Chimneys).*
Central Gully, Precipice of Sron na Ciche.*
North-west Face of Sgurr Alasdair (by route described).
Slanting Gully, Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.*

Exceptionally Severe Courses.

South-west Crack, Inaccessible Pinnacle.
Waterpipe Gully (direct).
Third Pinnacle, from Bhasteir Corrie.
The Black Chimney, Sgurr nan Gillean.
The Cioch, direct from Corrie Lagan.

For the benefit of those whose holiday is limited, I have marked with an asterisk the six climbs which strike me as being the best in their section.

In these days, when the words of the wise are upon every climber's tongue and the intention to obey them in too few climbers' minds, many expedients have been suggested to prevent foolish or ignorant people from coming to grief. With the former class it is to be feared no good counsel will avail in the future, any more than it has in the past. For the latter, however, this graduated list of climbs should be a strong safeguard. The beginner, or the man fresh to the Skye climbs, will see at a glance which are the easier courses; if he selects one of these for a start and gauges the difficulty of the climb by his own ability, he can obtain a good idea of how far he may safely go.

And here it ought to be said that several of the "difficult courses" and all those marked "exceptionally severe" should only be attempted by parties that are *unusually capable* and *of long experience*. If this book were written only for moderately strong parties, these courses would be omitted. But, like the mountains with which it deals, it caters for all grades of climbers, and those of limited experience or ability will, I feel sure, appreciate this fact.

In a book on rock-climbing, the question as to which is the right- or left-hand side of a gully, chimney, or arête is one that always crops up. I have described the right- or left-hand side of such places as the right- or left-hand side *looking up*, except, and these cases are few, where a descent is described.

From the outset the illustrations have been regarded as a chief feature of the book. The

great majority of these have been taken especially for the purpose, and now see the light of publicity for the first time. With due regard to the main object, it need scarcely be said that utility has been considered before artistic effect. Where possible, good "composition" has been studied, but in most cases "atmosphere" has been given but little consideration; clearness of detail is essential to the success of the topographical views. To facilitate the exact location of the peaks and climbs, outline drawings have been prepared, and will be found facing the illustrations to which they refer.

It may be of interest to amateur photographers to know that the negatives were taken in the whole-plate size ($8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 6\frac{1}{2}''$), on glass plates. If it should be their intention to manipulate a similarly weighty apparatus, I can only hope that their friends may prove as willing as I have invariably found mine, to "take a turn at the 'sack.'" I am very greatly their debtor.

I should like also to avail myself of this opportunity of conveying my heartiest thanks to those fellow-climbers who have in other ways so generously contributed to any success this volume may achieve—to Messrs. A. E. Field and Colin B. Phillip for much invaluable help and advice; and to Messrs. C. Pilkington, W. Douglas, C. W. Nettleton, Professor J. N. Collie, W. C. Slingsby, G. Yeld, Professor W. Knight, R. Moreland, E. W. Steeple, and C. T. Dent for much kindly assistance.

A. P. A.

THE SCREES, KESWICK.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Sgurr nan Gillean and its Three Ridges	1
II.	The Third Pinnacle, Sgurr nan Gillean	23
III.	The Climbs on the First Pinnacle—Sgurr nan Gillean	41
IV.	The Climbs from Bhasteir Corrie	53
V.	The Executioner and his Tooth	68
VI.	Bidein Druim nan Ramh	90
VII.	Sgurr an Fheadain and its Chief Chanter	104
VIII.	Sgurr a'Mhadaidh	123
IX.	Sgurr na Banachdich and Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh	151
X.	Sgurr Dearg and the "Inaccessible" Pinnacle	175
XI.	Sgurr Mhic Choinnich	192
XII.	Sgurr Alasdair and Sgurr Tearlach	208
XIII.	The Precipice of Sron na Ciche, Sgurr Sgumain	232
XIV.	Further Climbs on the Precipice of Sron na Ciche	253
XV.	Notes on Some of the Remaining Peaks	270
XVI.	Blaven and Clach Glas	284
XVII.	Chiefly Historical and Personal	304
	Table of Pronunciations and Translations	319
	A Short Glossary of Mountaineering Terms	321
	Index	323

ILLUSTRATIONS

COLLOTYPE PLATES

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Clach Glas from the North . . . . . *Frontispiece*

The Third Pinnacle from Knight's Peak. Sgurr nan Gillean . . . . . *Facing p.* 8

The "Gendarme." Western Ridge of Sgurr nan Gillean . . . . . „ 16

Sgurr nan Gillean and the Pinnacle Ridge . „ 26

Sligachan and Sgurr nan Gillean . . . . „ 42

The Coolin from Bruach na Frithe . . . „ 58

Am Basteir and Bhasteir Tooth . . . . „ 70

Bhasteir Tooth from Lota Corrie . . . „ 80

Harta and Lota Corries . . . . . „ 96

Bidein Druim nan Ramh from the Druim nan Ramh . . . . . „ 98

Corrie na Creiche . . . . . „ 106

The Great Pitch, Waterpipe Gully . . . „ 116

Corrie Tairneilear and Sgurr a'Mhadaidh . „ 128

The Cracks Pitch, Slanting Gully. Sgurr a'Mhadaidh . . . . . „ 136

Lochs Coruisk and Scavaig from Sgurr a'Mhadaidh . . . . . „ 142

Loch Coruisk and the Coolin . . . . . „ 164

Sgurr na Banachdich and Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh from Sgurr Dearg . . . . . „ 172

The "Inaccessible" Pinnacle, Sgurr Dearg . „ 176

The South-west Crack, "Inaccessible" Pinnacle „ 188

Sgurr Alasdair from Sgurr Dearg . . *Facing p.* 210
The Upper Rocks of Sgurr Alasdair . . . „ 226
The Upper Wall of the Tearlach-Dubh Gap . „ 228
The Precipice of Sron na Ciche . . . . „ 234
The Cioch Slab . . . . . „ 238
A Misty Day on the Cioch . . . . . „ 250
Loch Scavaig and Sgurr Dubh . . . . „ 280
Clach Glas and Blaven from Loch an Athain . „ 286
The Ridge of the Coolin from Clach Glas . „ 290
The "Impostor." The Top of Clach Glas from the South . . . . . „ 294
The Coolin, Black and Red, from the Top of Clach Glas . . . . . „ 308

John Mackenzie (*From a Photograph*) . . . „ 196

LINE DIAGRAMS IN THE TEXT

Sgurr nan Gillean from Sligachan . . . *Page* 4
The Climbs of Sgurr nan Gillean . . . „ 26
The Coolin from Bruach na Frithe . . . „ 58
The Climbs on Sgurr an Fheadain and Sgurr a'Mhadaidh . . . . . „ 106
The Coolin around Loch Coruisk . . . „ 164
The Climbs from Corrie Lagan . . . . „ 210
The Precipice of Sron na Ciche . . . . „ 234
Clach Glas and Blaven . . . . . „ 286
The Coolin from Clach Glas . . . . „ 290

MAP

The Main Ridge of the Coolin, Skye . . . *In pocket*
(3 *inches to mile*)

O, far black hills of Skye! O, mist-wreathed Coolin!
How ye recall to us the days gone by,
When kindred spirits met to scale your summits
'Neath cloud-swept sky.

Set in your Northern Isle as precious jewels,
Ye deck no crown of fleeting dynasty,
But tower aloft in splendid isolation
Eternally.

Who would not roam again your wind-swept corries,
And breathe anew the strong keen air of dawn,
Where golden eagles soar on outspread pinions
To greet the morn?

Who could forget the aftermath of glory
Crowning a day of sport, as one by one
They lingered on the crest of mighty Blaven
At set of sun,

And watched the twilight creep o'er moor and mountain,
The peat-smoke rising from the crofter's home,
The golden gleam of day's farewell o'erspreading
The ocean foam?

Oft in our lowland homes or hustling cities
We wistful yearn for well-lov'd hill and plain,
And fain would journey, freed from care and worry,
To climb again.

Then mem'ry conjures up your riven summits,
Your sculptured crags and wildly rushing streams;
We see ye still, O, far-off, well-loved Coolin,
In waking dreams!

LUCY BARLOW ABRAHAM.

ROCK-CLIMBING IN SKYE

CHAPTER I

SGURR NAN GILLEAN AND ITS THREE RIDGES

SGURR NAN GILLEAN takes high rank amongst the mountains of Great Britain for beauty of form and commanding situation.

Seen from Sligachan, it rises full 3000 feet from its pedestal of dark moorland, broad of base and massive in mould, but delicately poised and graceful to a degree. As the eye wanders upward over wild corrie, dark ravine, and shattered precipice to its summit, one cannot but be struck by its arresting presence, nor help feeling proud that there belongs to our home-land such a fine mountain as this. For mountain it is, in the most exacting sense of the word. True, it possesses no glacier, and is comparatively insignificant in mere size; but it boasts a feature that many a peak four times its height cannot—there is no way of reaching its summit without actual hand-to-hand climbing.

It was for many years considered the highest peak of the Coolin, but now that the peaks farther along the ridge have become better known, its pride of place has been usurped, and it ranks with Sgurr na Banachdich, fifth in altitude.

Its highest point is supported by three sharp, well-defined ridges, one running westward from the summit towards Am Basteir, one to the north towards Sligachan, and the other south-eastward.

The last named is not seen from the inn at all, and the north ridge, the famous Pinnacle Route, is so much foreshortened that only under exceptional circumstances of light or vapour can its pinnacles be dissociated from the rocks behind, or its general character as a ridge be ascertained.

The south-east ridge is the one by which the first ascent was made. This was on July 7, 1836, by the late Professor J. D. Forbes—a pioneer of the early days of Swiss mountaineering—and one Duncan Macintyre, who acted as his guide, and to whose repeated attempts on the mountain Professor Forbes no doubt owed somewhat of his success.

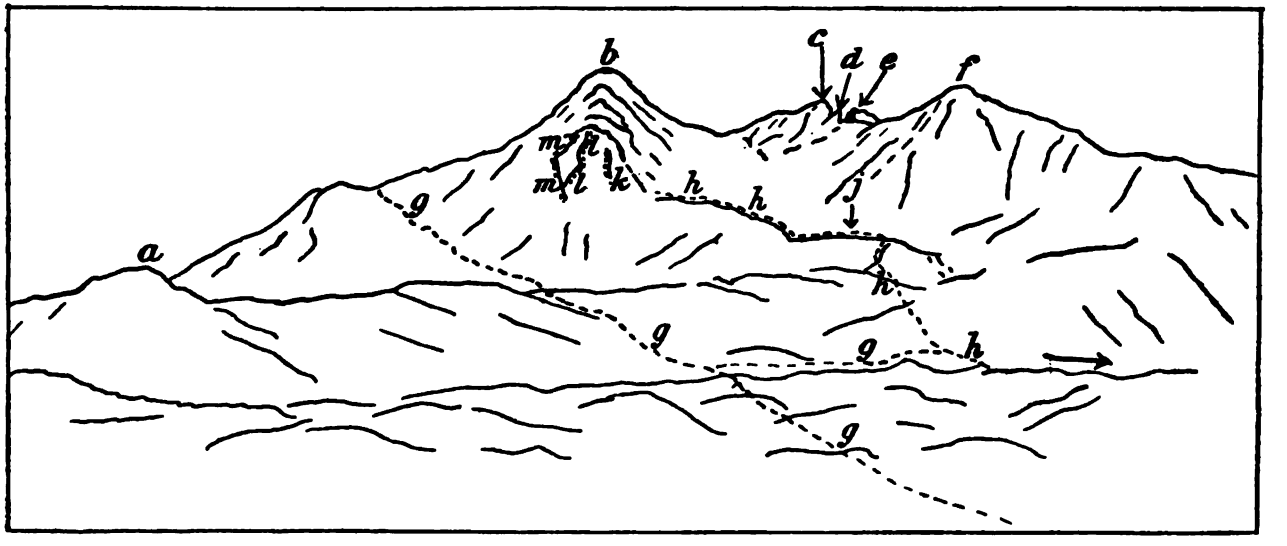
His record of the first ascent is as follows: "The ascent of Sgurr nan Gillean was deemed impossible at the time of my first visit in 1836. Talking of it with an active forester in the service of Lord Macdonald, named Duncan Macintyre, whom I engaged to guide me from Coruisk to Sligachan, he told me that he had attempted it repeatedly without success, both by himself and also with different strangers who had engaged him for the purpose; but he indicated a way different from those which he had already tried, which he thought might be more successful. I engaged him to accompany me, and next day (July 7) we succeeded in gaining the top; the extreme roughness of the rocks rendering the ascent safe, when, with any other formation, it might have been consider-

ably perilous. Indeed, I have never seen a rock so adapted for clambering."

Professor Forbes' route was approximately the one now followed by those whose desire it is to ascend the mountain in the easiest manner. It is known as the Tourist Route, and although it contains but little difficulty to an ordinarily athletic person, it does necessitate handling the rocks near the summit. In bad weather it is an easy thing to miss the way, and unless the tourist is capable of extricating himself from rough and precipitous ground, it would perhaps be advisable to engage a guide for the ascent.

In winter and early spring this Tourist Route can be quite difficult, and provides sport that even a first-rate, properly equipped party could not afford to despise. From Sligachan, as has been said, the actual ridge cannot be seen, but it is not difficult to reach. From Alldearg House the direction to be taken across the moor is due south, until the lower continuation of the north ridge is topped. From here a short descent is made, passing Loch a'Choire Riabhaich on the left, whence a steep grind upward to and over a prominent stone-shoot brings one into the next corrie, Coire nan Allt Geala. A well-marked gap in the ridge up to the right will then be noticed. Once this is attained, the ridge is roughly followed to the top. The last stage, though nearly horizontal, is somewhat exposed. It lies along a narrow neck, with a declivity on either side, and many pedestrians have been content to regard the summit from this short distance without actually reaching it.

Apart from its ascent by the various ridges,



a Eagle's Nest Crags.
b Sgurr nan Gillean.
c Am Basteir.
d Bhasteir Tooth.
e Sgurr a'Fionn Choire.
f Sgurr a'Bhasteir.
g "Tourist Route" up Sgurr nan Gillean.
h Best route to foot of Pinnacles.
j Bhasteir Gorge.
k The Black Crack.
l Sligachan Gully.
m North-east Route up First Pinnacle. The arrow points towards Alldearg House.

SGURR NAN GILLEAN FROM SLIGACHAN

Sgurr nan Gillean abounds in good rock-climbs. Partly due, no doubt, to its proximity to Sligachan, it is the most thoroughly explored of all the Coolin, and first ascents in its vicinity are almost as difficult to make as they are around the climbing centres of Wales or the English Lakeland. The climbs are mostly to be found above Bhasteir Corrie, on and between the four pinnacles which serrate the north ridge, and upon the highest peak itself.

The Northern and Western Ridges.—The Northern or Pinnacle Ridge holds very much the same position with regard to the Coolin climbs as Deep Ghyll on Scawfell does to those around Wastdale.

Just as Deep Ghyll is typical of much of the Cumberland climbing, so the Pinnacle Ridge typifies to a great extent that amongst the Coolin. They serve respectively very much the same purpose: they are generally taken for a first day; they are about equal in point of difficulty; they introduce the climber to magnificent rock-scenery, and they leave him at the end of the day feeling that, though he has experienced but little difficulty and has had none of those "nervy moments" so dear to a certain class of rock-gymnast, he has done a climb in every way delightful. And there, perhaps, the analogy ceases. Whereas Deep Ghyll takes one into the hollows of Scawfell, the Pinnacle Route lifts one up to higher air and the spires of Sgurr nan Gillean.

The Pinnacle Ridge appropriates a great part of the time of most of the climbing *habitués* of Sligachan. It is a climb which they will do time

after time, one which, although every nook and corner may be familiar, will generally lure them back to it. And on each occasion they will discover some new charm. The true mystery of the mountains, which deepens with intimate knowledge and never stales, is always there.

It is somewhat unfortunate, from a writer's point of view, that the climb appeals more to the æsthetic than to the physical side of one. Pen and ink are better adapted to describe hairbreadth escapes, critical situations, and physical discomfort than to conjure up pictures of fine rock-scenery. They are powerless, even in the best hands, to convey the thrill of exhilaration that comes to those who scramble along a serrated rock-ridge on which the hand- and foot-holds are abundant, and into the ascent of which excitement and peril only enter in a small degree. Similarly powerless are they to convey the feeling of delight experienced in clinging to a steep rock-face in perfect safety, or to bring home to one the joys of being out amongst the bare gabbro rocks above the moor.

To appreciate these things, it is necessary to penetrate into the sanctuaries—to be a rock-climber, in short. The good things of the Pinnacle Ridge are reserved for those who go amongst them, but can only be observed to advantage at close quarters. Yet something of interest, topographically and historically, may come out in the telling, and perhaps also something of use to those who have not been there and of pleasure in recalling familiar scenes to those who have; so, after all, my task may not be in vain.

The pinnacles of the ridge are numbered from

the lowest to the highest, the lowest being the First Pinnacle. The Fourth Pinnacle is generally known as Knight's Peak, and the Fifth is Sgurr nan Gillean itself.

They form the nearest rock-climb to Sligachan, the foot of the First Pinnacle being easily reached in an hour and a half. In clear weather a bee-line can be taken from Alldearg House across the moor, above the left-hand (east) side of Bhasteir Gorge to the base of the Pinnacle; but those who have no knowledge of the neighbourhood, and are wishful to find the climb in mist, can make certain of so doing by first attaining the Eagle's Nest Ridge, which comes down into Glen Sligachan south-east of the inn. The crest of this continues unbroken to the foot of the First Pinnacle, where a small cairn on its Bhasteir Corrie side indicates the beginning of the climb.

The rocks are well broken up, and permit of a variety of routes. Generally speaking, the further to the left one keeps, the more difficult becomes the climbing; but the easiest way is very easy indeed, and soon lands the climber on the top of the First Pinnacle. The dip between it and its second brother is very slight, and the scramble to the top is almost entirely lacking in interest.

The Third Pinnacle is very different in character, and possesses more individuality. It has quite a sharp summit, and to reach it necessitates a certain amount of hand-to-hand climbing, albeit of an easy nature.

Broken rocks lead upward to the foot of a shallow gully, furnishing splendid holds. This continues almost to the top of the pinnacle, which

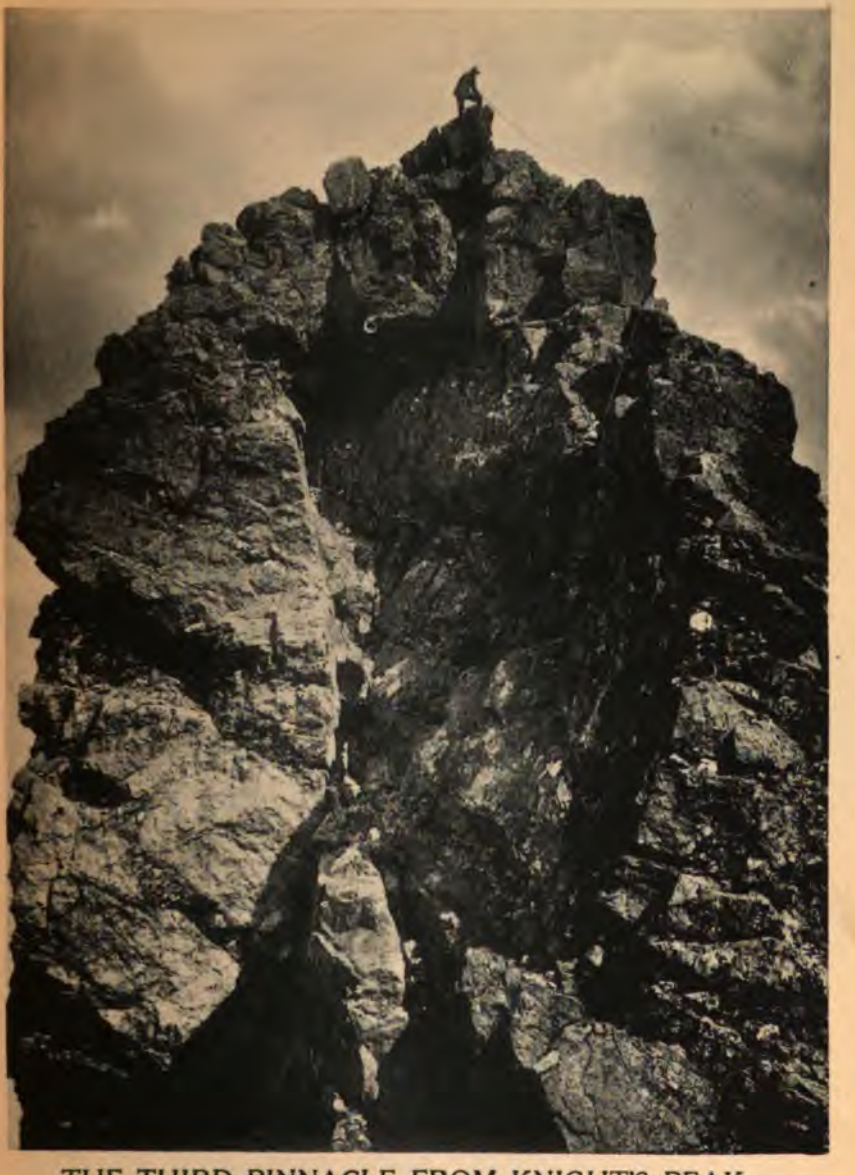
is splintered and riven into deep clefts. And here the character of the scene changes. A glance over the far edge discloses a very steep gap beyond the gap beyond, across which the Third Pinnacle, or Knight's Peak, looks very [illegible].

The summit rocks of the Third Pinnacle overhang slightly, and a direct descent to the gap would seem an impossibility. By leaning over the edge an open gully of easy inclination will be discovered below. The problem seems to be in reaching it. It is bounded on each side by a curtain of rock, that on our left continuing for some distance; while the *vis-à-vis* on the right terminates abruptly [illegible] under the topmost rocks of the pinnacle.

The easiest way down is that along the crest of the left-hand curtain nearly to the point where it falls vertically over into the gap. Just before the steep place is reached, a well-marked chimney will be noticed leading downward to the right. This is the route most commonly followed; it avoids the easiest way of gaining the gully mentioned above.

The holds in the upper part of the chimney are excellent; but after descending a few feet the steepness of the rocks renders the next movement somewhat uncertain. The footholds are so small beneath one as to be difficult of discernment. Moreover, when found, they slope slightly outward and are rather smoother than is altogether pleasant with comfort. This is the "tit-bit" of the climb, and is known as the "bad step." The [illegible] beneath is somewhat sensational, and on

[illegible] figure in illustration opposite is at this place.



THE THIRD PINNACLE FROM KNIGHT'S PEAK.
SGURR NAN GILLEAN.

a first visit to the place it is a common thing for the last man down to pass his rope around a good "belay" which is conveniently placed above, and so descend well safeguarded. However, by keeping a foot or two to the right at the steepest part, good holds are obtainable, and the doubled rope can be safely dispensed with. This part is about 25 feet in height, and gives out on a narrow scree-ledge which leads around into the gully directly under the summit we have just left, or straight downward over a slab of easy inclination.

Another route of descent is by way of the right-hand curtain. This goes well enough at first; but the last few feet, where one drops over into the gully, are almost devoid of hold: the chief recommendation of this route is its difficulty.

Some years ago I once witnessed here an elderly gentleman, his figure spread-eagled on the face of the rock, his feet scraping in all directions for a hold which did not exist. He was unable to let his weight on to the rope, and after some abortive struggles he shouted up to the guides: "There's something here I don't understand. I think I have cramp in my stomach."

One of them hurried down to him, and found that his trouble was a small spike of rock which had caught in his waistcoat. And then I heard, in a comforting undertone: "Nae, nae, sir; it's no the cramp in yer stomach ye've gotten, but a bit of rock, and it's verra near as bad!"

After gaining the gully, easy scrambling soon leads to the gap between the Third and Fourth Pinnacles.

The ascent of Knight's Peak can be varied to

the taste of the climber. The usual way bears to the right along a wide rock ledge which slopes slightly to the climber's disadvantage, and is generally covered with small scree. The ledge is followed for about 50 feet to a point whence easy rocks lead upward to the summit. By following the ledge along, its continuation will be found to extend, by way of some very exposed and sharp corners, right round the peak into the gap between it and Sgurr nan Gillean.

A more entertaining way of ascending Knight's Peak is to strike straight upward from the gap. After 20 feet of steep rock, a small recess is reached. The escape from this, up a slab delightfully lacking in hold but which is traversed by an oblique crack, is quite enjoyable.

Above this pleasant variation the weakness of the Pinnacle Ridge as a climb once more asserts itself—the rocks are easy, and can be scaled in almost any direction. Knight's Peak has two summits, or rather the narrow summit ridge contains two prominent points connected by a stretch of rock which can be traversed with ease. Across the chasm, and towering grandly above, is the Fifth Pinnacle—Sgurr nan Gillean itself.

It was from this high vantage-ground that Professor W. Knight surveyed the Fourth Pinnacle in 1873. I am indebted to him for the following most interesting account of how he came to make its first ascent. In answer to a letter of mine he writes :—

"I climbed that peak of the Sgurr nan Gillean group on the 12th of August 1873. It was then called the Needle Rock. Afterwards, I think at the suggestion of my good friend, the late Sheriff

Alexander Nicolson—a Skye man of great distinction and repute—it was named 'The Little Horn.' I am glad to be able to tell you something about my ascent, for it is still vivid in memory, and is the only peak I was the first to climb, although I have ascended many in Switzerland and Scotland by new tracks.

"In 1873 I had done a good deal of mountaineering in Switzerland, ascending fourteen peaks, including the Matterhorn, and crossing eleven passes, during two months of climbing, in weather of unprecedented brilliance. I then determined to try to conquer some of the unascended peaks of Scotland, and went to Skye, in the year 1873. As I had a companion with me who was unaccustomed to climbing, and would not venture without the assistance of local experts, I took with us the Sligachan guide. After resting some time on the summit and carefully studying the face of the 'Needle,' I was convinced—from my experience of rock-work in the Alps—that it could be climbed by a zigzag track. I had much difficulty, however, in persuading the local guide—whose name, *I think*, was MacPherson—to accompany me. He said he had never done anything 'so venturesome' before; but as it would have been imprudent and dangerous to attempt it alone, I offered him a bribe, which, after some hesitation, he accepted. We went down to the foot of the 'Needle'—a somewhat tedious scramble—and again, looking up at the pinnacle, MacPherson hesitated. But when I told him of much more difficult things which climbers do in the Alps (thinking nothing of them), and doubled the bribe,

he yielded. We made the ascent slowly and circuitously. I took the lead, and had sometimes to drag the guide up after me; while in the descent I had frequently to give him my shoulder for a rest to his feet.

"It was not a long climb from the foot to the summit in distance, but it involved a good deal of scheming, and at times a change of plans, as we proceeded. When we reached the top I made him sing one stanza of a Gaelic song—much to the amazement of my companion in the distance—as I told him that the Swiss guides always sang when they reached the top of a mountain. Then it suddenly occurred to me that we had no substantial evidence to leave behind us that we had really made this ascent. I therefore told the guide to rest, and I descended some distance alone. There were no loose stones to be gathered, but I managed to wrench out of the crevices some fragments of the hard, hypersthene rock. Luckily I had a small geological hammer with me; and with the stones I gathered I filled my numerous pockets and went up again. I then put my card in a soda-water bottle, which the guide was carrying, and corked it firmly. MacPherson, who was a mason by trade, built a small cairn with the stones, into which we placed the bottle as securely as we could. After a long survey of the peaks, ridges, and valleys that were visible, we began the descent, finding it at places much more difficult than the ascent had been. More than once I thought that the weight of the guide behind would push me down to the bottom of the 'Little Horn.' Again and again I had to cling to bits of projecting rock, and made

MacPherson do the same. It was an experience like that of Sir Bedivere—

> "'. . . All to left and right
> The bare black cliff clanged round us as we based
> Our feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
> Sharp smitten by the dint of armèd heels.'

"We came down the same side of the peak as that by which we had ascended, the one facing Sgurr nan Gillean. When we got to the foot, MacPherson said with a sigh, 'I shall never go up that mountain, never no more.' I gave him my flask for consolation, and said he must now become 'the guide to the Needle.' I then tried to persuade him to accompany me in a much more arduous enterprise, viz. a three days' expedition, ascending each peak of the Coolin in succession, and sleeping out amongst them. I proposed to take two porters from Sligachan, one with provisions and the other with blankets, &c., and told him we must have ropes to assist in getting up and down at hazardous places. The idea of being roped together in our work was too much for him. He had never heard of ropes being used save for fastening stacks of corn, protecting roofs against winter storms, or for executions! The plan was therefore given up. On returning to Sligachan we got out the landlord's large telescope, and were greatly pleased to find that, on the top of 'the Needle,' we could distinctly make out the tiny cairn within which were our bottle and my card. I wrote from his much-loved inn at Sligachan to tell Sheriff Nicolson of my ascent, and some years afterwards he, with his friend the late Alexander Gibson, ascended 'the

Needle,' finding the cairn not much injured (so well had MacPherson built it), and within were the bottle and my card of August 12, 1873. He wisely changed the name of the peak to that of the Little Horn."

The route described is one of great steepness, and although it is nowadays not difficult to a properly equipped climbing party, great credit is due to Professor Knight and his companion for having climbed it without a rope, and always in the uncertainty as to whether or not they were attempting something impossible of performance. A climb is often robbed of all its terrors when one knows that others have already accomplished it.

From the summit of Knight's Peak, good sound rocks take one downward to a wide scree ledge, from which a rock ridge runs outward almost horizontally towards Sgurr nan Gillean. This is followed for a few feet, and then the descent is made on the right of it. The rock-scenery hereabouts is very fine, and the rocks to be descended almost perpendicular. The holds are good, however, and so continue until a short gully is reached that leads to the foot of the peak.

In the gap between it and Sgurr nan Gillean is another small pinnacle which for some strange reason was considered inaccessible until quite recently, when a party dispelled the illusion by climbing it. In reality it gives a pleasant and not difficult scramble, but, if it be of importance, an economy in time can be effected by skirting its base on the right-hand side. The first step on to Sgurr nan Gillean is rather awkward—in

fact, I have known novices climb all the rest of the Pinnacle Route but this small stretch without assistance. A push from behind is useful, and then easy rocks stretch away for about 200 feet to the West Ridge, which is struck a few feet only below the narrow ridge which is the top of the mountain. A pleasant variation can be had by taking the last 50 feet direct to the summit, instead of finishing on the West Ridge.

The route just described is undoubtedly the best by which to make a first ascent of Sgurr nan Gillean. The views all the way to the summit-ridge are composed of details of the same side of the mountain as is visible from Sligachan. The fine rock-pinnacles, steep declivities, and extensive moorland, widening in scope as the climber ascends, until the open sea and all that the contrast between it and the rocks affords, are indeed grand; but, after all, such prospects can be enjoyed from many of the Scottish peaks. They are very different from the view of the whole main ridge of the Coolin. This suddenly bursts upon one in the most dramatic way as the ridge is gained. One's head is thrust over the edge and there, stretching away to the distance, and outlined against a background of delicately tinted ocean, is such a scene of wonderful mountain landscape as occupies one's senses to the exclusion of all else.

This was my own first view of Coolin ridge, and I remember well how we all came to a standstill and just gazed in wonder and silence, until one of us broke the spell with a deep breath and summed up our feelings by a hushed exclamation, "Isn't it grand!" When some one pulled

out a map in order to locate the various peaks, it seemed almost like an act of sacrilege.

Two mountain scenes stand out far above all others in my memory—one my first impression of the Matterhorn, and the other this first view of the Cuillin. I had read the most graceful descriptions and seen most perfect photographs of both, so utterly inadequate were they that I have never dared to attempt to describe this view. The hackneyed phrase, "it must be seen to be realized," applies here with exceptional force.

The Pinnacle Route was climbed by Messrs. Collie and Laurence Pilkington in 1880. No mention of previous climbers were noticed until they reached Professor Knight's cairn on the Fourth Pinnacle, so it is pretty certain that theirs was the first ascent of the whole ridge.

The ascent is generally made by way of the Pinnacle Ridge, a part of the Coolin backbone, and the "Direction" like that just ascended. The ridge for its upper 200 feet is quite easy, and somewhat of the narrow east end of Crib Goch, except that this ridge is inclined and more

[illegible] ending some distance it dwindles [illegible] more in diameter than an ordinary [illegible] wall. A trap dyke here intersects at right angles, and has helped to [illegible] weird looking stretch of mountain [illegible] worn from the side, daylight can [illegible] it in several places. On either [illegible] drops away vertically. To com- [illegible] gully is a small gabbro *gendarme* [illegible] on the top of the narrowest

"THE GENDARME".
WESTERN RIDGE OF SGURR NAN GILLEAN.

portion. This is the famous *Gendarme* of Sgurr nan Gillean, more familiarly known as the Policeman, and it has no counterpart in all the rest of the ridge.

Its passage must have caused considerable misgiving in the hearts of those who first made it, lest the whole fabric should collapse. It really looks so insecure that the weight of a man might at first sight be deemed sufficient to dislodge it. A remembrance of the storms it has weathered will dispel this idea; but, even so, in crossing it in a high wind, it is not difficult to imagine that it is the ridge that quivers and not the climber.

In descending, a drop of about 8 feet over steep smooth rock—the change from gabbro to the dyke of smooth basalt is at once apparent—lands one on the narrow part. Poised upon it are some loose blocks. These are crossed, and then the Policeman bars the way. He is only orthodox in his methods in that he regulates the traffic to a nicety. A fine sense of discrimination is his. His policy is not that of "move on," but one of "move off." Like some of his human namesakes, he is mostly bluff, however, and if dealt with in the proper way, proves amenable to reason. You must keep on the right side of him. The holds are upon that side. The wind is generally upon the other, and tends to blow one off. The climber hugs him as closely as though he were a human being and the climber a vagrant after a club dinner. With his arms round the neck of the Policeman, he reaches home, or, rather, the easier part beyond.

For those who dislike the look of this part

of the ridge, a way of escape presents itself at a point some little distance before it is reached, where an easy gully leads down into Bhasteir Corrie. This is called Nicolson's Chimney, after the late Sheriff Nicolson, who first descended the ridge to this point in June 1865. "We proceeded very carefully down that pinnacled ridge till we came to a cleft which seemed to be the only possible way of getting to the bottom, and down which the only mode of progression was crawling on our backs. During the last few yards of our vermicular descent we could not see where we were to stop, and great was my satisfaction when I found my heels resting at the foot of the precipice among a heap of débris, and nothing formidable between us and the depths of Coir' a'Bhàsadair." So he writes of his exploit in the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*.[1]

A few feet further along than the Policeman a vertical drop of about 25 feet necessitates a retreat—unless a hitched rope is used—to a short rock-chimney on the Bhasteir Corrie side of the ridge. The descent of this finishes the serious climbing, and Bealach a'Bhasteir is soon reached. It is then an easy matter to descend to Bhasteir Corrie, or, as an alternative, into Lota Corrie, and thence by way of Harta Corrie and Glen Sligachan back to the inn.[2]

Such are the Northern and Western Ridges under normal conditions.

With ice and snow on the rocks their traverse

[1] Vol. ii. p. 106.

[2] When time permits, the traverse of Am Basteir and the Tooth are sometimes added. This occupies from 1½ to 2½ hours extra.

is a very different matter; in fact, they are sometimes quite inaccessible, even as late in the year as April. I well recall such a time, when two days were spent in unsuccessful attempts to scale them. The first day after we arrived, a party of three of us set off from Sligachan, which was bathed in a warm spring sunshine.

The cap of snow extending from about the 2000-foot line to the summit of Sgurr nan Gillean caused us little anxiety, and it never crossed my mind that we should encounter any insurmountable difficulty. But when we gained the foot of the rocks we saw that they were thickly glazed, and that several inches of new snow had fallen. We soon realised that the Pinnacle Route would be too stiff for a first day, so decided to make our ascent by the easier Western Ridge.

The rope was put on and steps were cut in the hard snow along the foot of the Pinnacles, until we attained Bealach a 'Bhasteir, and thence to the tower of rock below the *gendarme*. This brought us to a standstill. It was quite free from snow on the near side, but too steep to climb, so we contoured along its base eastward until the short chimney was reached. A thin veneer of ice covered the rocks here, however, and an exciting half-hour, during which we gained but little altitude, brought home to us the fact that even the Western Ridge was not for us that day. We cut steps along its base in a vain endeavour to find a feasible route upward and then abandoned our project, returning to Sligachan in a much subdued frame of mind.

Three days later found us once more at the foot

of the Pinnacle Ridge, cutting steps up the *couloir* between the First and Second Pinnacles. It cost us an hour and a half of exceedingly arduous work to gain the top, and then a heavy hail-storm set in. This made it evident that Sgurr nan Gillean would score a second time, but we climbed to the top of the Second Pinnacle, sometimes by way of the ice- and snow-covered rocks, and at others resorting to steep slow slopes.

Above us, through the mist, towered the Third Pinnacle; from its sharp summit the wind whirled upward a dense column of powdery snow which spread out fan-like ere it disappeared before the gale, beautiful to watch, but promising discomfiture when we reached its area.

After consultation we decided to press onward, for the hour was early as yet, and our climb looked feasible for some considerable distance ahead. The rocks were much steeper hereabouts, and the snow and ice had to be cleared from them before we could safely ascend. The steep portion below the summit was distinctly difficult, and during those times when the wind blew in force, dashing the snow and hail in our faces, we experienced all the sensations that obtain in the ascent of a first-rate Swiss peak.

At 3.30 P.M. we reached the top, and from a niche in the rocks peered over into the chasm that divides the Third and Fourth Pinnacles. By hitching a rope over an outstanding rock and climbing down it we knew we could descend to the gap; but could we get beyond it? And if we went so far and found the rest impracticable, could we retrace our steps and regain the foot of

the First Pinnacle before nightfall? It was very doubtful; we decided that there were pleasanter places at which to spend the night than that storm-swept ridge of the Pinnacles, and turned to the descent.

And now the storm became a veritable *tourmente* of snow, hail, and wind. My companions scrambled quickly downward, by the aid of the rope, after which I turned a spare 80-foot length round a spike of rock and followed them hand over hand. After as difficult a stretch of climbing as one could wish, we regained the top of the *couloir* and started its descent.

About half-way down we were caught by a terrific hailstorm. The wind with a shriek swept the newly fallen snow upwards in a dense cloud, and then whirled it down upon us in cold spray. The steep *couloir* formed a rough funnel down which it slid in a small avalanche 6 inches deep. Our ice-axes thrust to the head into the old snow beneath were our chief stay, and we clung on to them, literally unable to see or hear each other through the driving storm, although not more than four yards separated us.

After a while the tempest subsided and we made the best use of the temporary calm to gain the slope at the foot of the Pinnacles. Thus ended our second attempt, one of the most exhilarating and unconventional day's mountaineering it has ever been my good fortune to share.

But Sgurr nan Gillean was still unclimbed; the Tourist Route seemed our only chance. False pride had been dissipated on our two previous attempts, and, indeed, so difficult had the snow

rendered all climbing that this otherwise easy route raised our expectations to a pitch more often realised by bigger climbs. The lower part of the ridge was easily gained, but only after much step-cutting up the steep snow slope leading to it. About 300 feet below the top of Sgurr nan Gillean we put on the rope, and thence onward was a stretch of climbing that engrossed our undivided attention. First came a steep *couloir* filled with powdery snow, waist-deep; then an awkwardly placed slab, covered with ice and the omnipresent snow; next a difficult step round a corner, followed by a short struggle up a narrow chimney, and we found ourselves looking at the summit-cairn across a narrow ridge of rock clustered with ice-crystals.

A few moments later we were shaking hands around the cairn with as much unction as though our peak possessed 12,000 feet greater altitude than it actually did. Mere height is often a secondary consideration, however, and the Coolin afford a fine instance of how much greater a factor of a climb is its technical difficulty than its size. We looked over at the Pinnacle Ridge and its western relative looming through the mists like silent white ghosts, and then retraced our steps downward and across the moor to Sligachan.

CHAPTER II

THE THIRD PINNACLE, SGURR NAN GILLEAN

It was thought of old that every mountain had but one summit, and that only one way up to it was needful. Nowadays the routes up our home mountains are infinite, and the way least frequented by rock-climbers is that which is easiest.

A certain famous mountaineer has said that all mountains appear doomed to pass through three stages. The earliest stage, when it is called an inaccessible peak, then the most difficult ascent, and, lastly, an easy day for a lady. Through these Sgurr nan Gillean has long since passed. There is a fourth phase, and this also it is fast approaching—when every available route to its summit and almost all the likely bits of rock upon its flanks have been scaled.

The mountain which has reached the third stage might be supposed no longer to possess much attraction. But a consideration of its fourth stage refutes this idea; for only when it has become intimately known and climbed in all directions can it be said to be fully appreciated. There are surely but few fresh climbs to be made upon Sgurr nan Gillean, wherefore it enters upon stage five—that when all its various routes are duly chronicled!

Looked at from Sgurr a'Bhasteir, most of the climbs upon it can be well seen. These, for the

most part, face westward into Corrie Bhasteir, and extend from the foot of the First Pinnacle along to the *Gendarme* on the Western Ridge. They are well graded, from "easy" to "exceptionally severe." All the gullies between the Pinnacles have been climbed, as also have their buttresses, although not in every case directly from their foot.

The Third Pinnacle from Bhasteir Corrie, and the Gully between it and the Second Pinnacle.—Walking down Bhasteir Corrie late one summer's evening, and looking up to the fine bastions that wall it in on the east, I fell to speculating on the possibility of making an ascent of the Third Pinnacle direct from the Corrie. I knew of no record of such an undertaking; perhaps no ascent had been made. The rocks of its lower reaches promised a very stiff problem. The Pinnacle as a prospect, and a large sunlit slab on which to lie, with a pipe, were too tempting to be rejected. A thorough survey of its great rounded buttress—the most impressive in the whole cirque of Corrie Bhasteir—provided half an hour's study of absorbing interest.

Cut into the face, slightly to its north side, a well-marked chimney descended from the skyline for 200 or 300 feet towards the corrie. This ceased abruptly in a black-looking cave about 300 feet above the scree-terrace at the foot of the Pinnacle. Immediately above this terrace the rocks looked fairly accessible for some distance up, where a distinctive ledge ran across the face. Between this ledge and the cave mentioned above was a wide slab, almost perpendicular in inclination, most for-

bidding in aspect, and, had it been elsewhere but in Skye, not worth speculation as affording a climb.

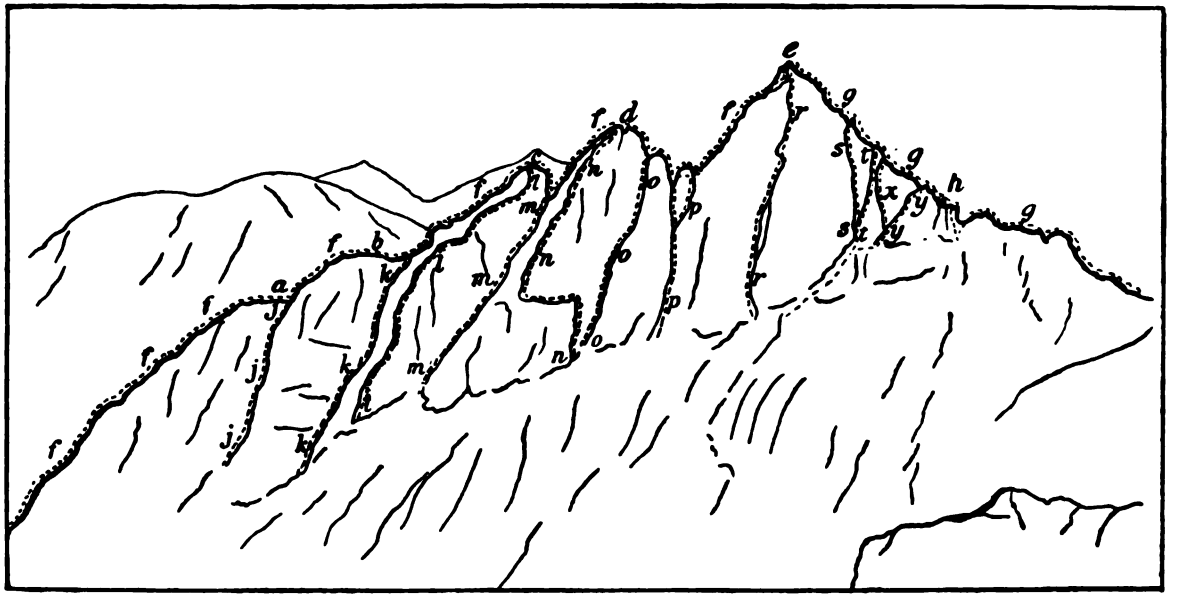
Perhaps this slab was the reason of the non-existent record that had perplexed me. It certainly looked an all-sufficient one. Then, in a detached sort of way, I fancied myself half-way up it, groping for holds, almost fatigued, painfully conscious of the depth below, and yearning for either the cave above or a position of comfort on the ledge beneath. Then imagination ran riot. Exhausted muscles, a last look round in despair, and then—but that was only a waking dream. I was still on my back in Bhasteir Corrie, with a cold pipe between my lips.

I decided to return with reinforcements on the morrow, and then strolled across the moor to Sligachan, turning now and again for another look, until the deepening gloom fused the rocks into a rich purple, full of mystery, and hiding all their details.

Next day Messrs. H. Harland and A. H. Binns accompanied me to the foot of the Third Pinnacle. A cairn was built to mark the beginning of our climb, should it ever materialise. This was at the bottom of an open rock-chimney about 30 feet high, which gave good sport, and proved a fitting introduction to our climb. From the ledge at its top another chimney, an easier continuation of that we had just ascended, sprang upward.

This was climbed, and then we struck obliquely across to the right, over rocks which, though not difficult, were never uninteresting, until we gained the ledge I had noticed from the corrie.

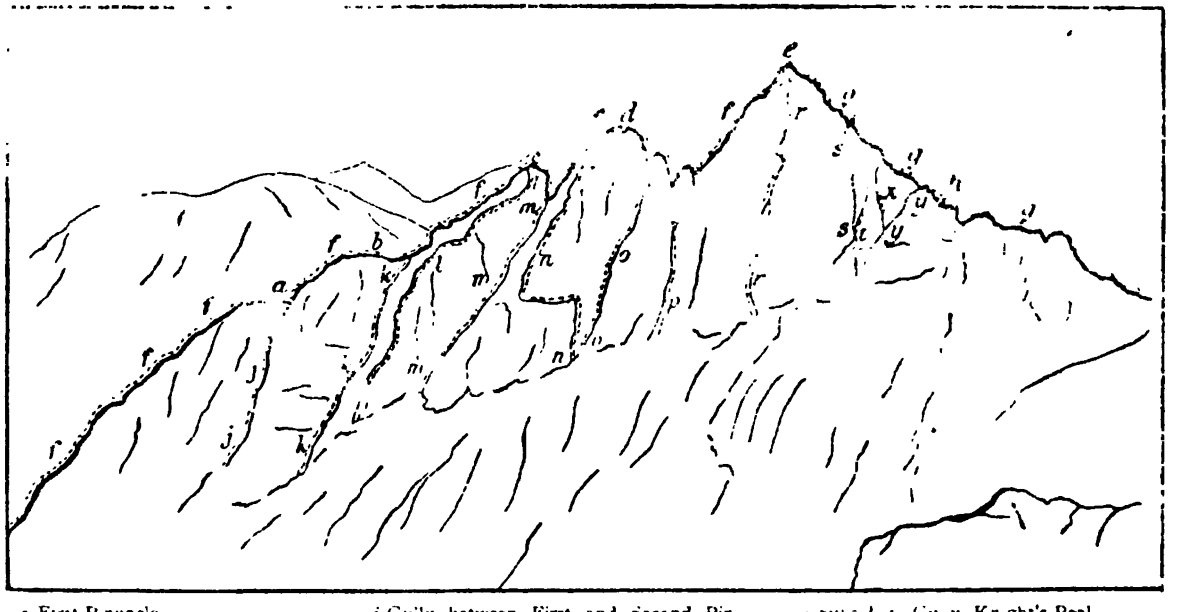
It was wide and roomy, and traversed almost the entire face of the Pinnacle. The rock immedi-



a First Pinnacle.
b Second Pinnacle.
c Third Pinnacle.
d Knight's Peak.
e Sgurr nan Gillean.
f The "Pinnacle Route."
g Western Ridge.
h The *Gendarme.*
j Gully between First and Second Pinnacles.
k Gully between Second and Third Pinnacles.
l Third Pinnacle climb.
m Gully between Third Pinnacle and Knight's Peak.
n Knight's Peak from the Corrie climb.
o Subsidiary Gully, Knight's Peak.
p Gully between Knight's Peak and Sgurr nan Gillean.
r The Forked Chimney.
s The Deep Chimney.
t Jammed-block Chimney.
x The Doctor's Chimney.
y Nicolson's Chimney.

THE CLIMBS OF SGURR NAN GILLEAN

SGURR NAN GILLEAN AND THE PINNACLE RIDGE



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THE CLIMBS OF SGURR NAN GILLEAN

SGURR NAN GILLEAN AND THE PINNACLE RIDGE.

ately above it was so steep that we could not see the upper part of the slab. The cave and chimney were quite hidden. We had made a careful note from below of their whereabouts, however, and, in order to obtain as easy a gradient up to them as possible, we traversed to the right-hand end of the ledge.

Our success looked but little more assured from here. A survey from above suggested itself as the wisest course; but Harland was anxious to have a try direct without resorting to this expedient, so Binns and I accordingly belayed ourselves well and paid out his rope. After considerable effort he scaled the almost vertical lower 30 feet, and then called upon me to join him.

"Have you any anchorage?" I shouted.

"Not much," he replied; "but you won't need any, and higher up it looks quite feasible."

Perhaps it did, but I felt sure he was too much underneath it to obtain a correct opinion. To me the thought that such a steep slab would yield easily was almost incredible. However, I climbed up to him, and found he had my rope hitched over an entirely inadequate splinter of rock. His standing room was but sufficient for himself, and before he would proceed he wished me to join him upon it, and belay him over the splinter.

The situation was most exposed. Directly below us, for we had worked somewhat to the right, the rocks plunged almost vertically downwards for 200 feet. Above was the slab—the cave was not yet in sight—and it certainly looked as though we might get higher.

But many things that look like good holds from

below become steeply sloping ledges when they are reached. Of the possibilities of the slab we knew nothing, not even if there were anchorage at the top or if it were possible to get into the cave from it. Besides, my position would be altogether unjustifiable as Harland worked upward, for should he slip or attain a place whence it was not easy to advance or retreat, I would be quite powerless to help him. My meditations of the previous evening were recalled. I refused to stay where I was, so descended to the ledge, and Harland had perforce to follow.

It was a very disgusted climber, who held forth on the simplicity of the slab and my lack of enterprise, that joined us a few moments later. However, as was subsequently proved, my timidity was justified.

After considerable discussion we decided to go to the top of the climb and, if possible, descend the chimney and have a look at the slab from above. To this end we retraced our steps to the left along the ledge, which led us into the gully between the Second and Third Pinnacles.

By climbing up the Pinnacle from its foot, we had missed the first pitch of this gully. This is about 40 feet in height, and is a wet, steep chimney surmounted by a boss of somewhat friable rock. We found subsequently that the chimney lent itself to backing up, and that the boss could be climbed on the right-hand side—a stiff pitch. Then a short stretch of scree brought us to the level of the ledge from which we had just retreated. At this point begins the second pitch. A great flat boulder has fallen from above and become wedged

between the gully walls, forming two chimneys, one on each side of the stone. In an endeavour to save time we utilised both routes, and my companions had nearly attained the top of their respective chimneys when their rope got caught on the face of the stone. Much discussion and explanation ended by both descending, and then climbing the left-hand chimney in orthodox style.

Then the walls of the gully narrowed, and became clean-cut and sheer. Straight ahead was a V-shaped stone wedged between them at a height of about 30 feet. This stone looked impossible of attainment from below, and we thought that probably there was a way out behind it; but when we got underneath and peered upward into the dark, mossy cave it formed, we were quickly disillusioned: the steeply sloping gully-bed led directly upward, and ceased at some huge overhanging blocks. There was no "through route." We were now at the level of the V-shaped stone, and saw that it was not the top of the pitch, but just the lowest of several wedged boulders. Between it and the boulders above was a hole, through which we saw blue sky, and through which it looked possible to pass.

I now recalled the late Joseph Collier's description of this pitch, and the careful way in which he had impressed me with the fact that it was "a real good one." He led the party that made the first ascent some years ago.

To reach the hole it was necessary to climb about 10 feet higher to the roof of the cave, and then, with feet on the holdless left wall and back on the other, to traverse outward horizontally about

20 feet until the hole was reached, whence a short scramble through it brought us to some screes and grass above the V-shaped boulder.

It was somewhat difficult to attain a wedged position in the cave before commencing the traverse, and the rope, being horizontal, was of no assistance. On a subsequent occasion, two of us, after considerable hard work, were sitting chatting on the boulder at the end of the traverse, waiting for our third man. He had twitted us about our difficulty in attaining the roof of the cave, and promised to show us how it should be done when his turn came. He said he had thought out a peculiar scheme for negotiating it, "a kind of twist."

He shouted for us to watch him, and, surely enough, by a peculiar twist of his anatomy he very neatly got his body into the right position for the traverse. He was somewhat elated, and being, as he thought, securely wedged, sat with his arms folded, smiling at us in great triumph; then suddenly his feet slipped, and, before he had time to get his hands on the rock, he slid right away and swung outward over the gully, like a spider at the end of its web, until he was directly under us. It was all very pretty, and he twisted beautifully; but was this part of his scheme? We shouted down for enlightenment. He said most emphatically, along with other things, that it was not, so we lowered him to the bed of the gully, afterwards upbraiding him for wasting our time over his "newfangled" ideas.

To resume our ascent, the upper storey of the pitch now rose directly above us—a huge boulder wedged across, forming a chimney with the left

wall of the gully. This was the only upward route, and gave us a tough struggle. It was quite short, however, and we soon reached its top. Above it the gully widened and then forked in various directions, presenting a choice of routes, any of which are of interest until they give out at the little col between the Pinnacles.

As we wished to get across to the right to the chimney on the nose of the Pinnacle, we chose a crack in the wall of the main gully. This brought us to a steep corner, after passing which we came to the desired chimney. It was not difficult, and we scrambled downward almost to a point where it seemed to plunge vertically over.

The others held my rope, and I descended until the chimney ceased. By craning over, I saw directly beneath me the cave I had noticed the preceding evening from the corrie. Below the cave was a long ledge, formed by the top of the slab we had not dared to tackle from below. Away at its far side, the side upon which we had delivered our attack, the rocks were rounded and holdless. It was plain to be seen that upon that side success did not lie. Directly beneath me the rocks were rougher, and a crack in the centre of the slab inspired hope. At all events, I had made out that there was good anchorage at the top, so I scrambled back to the others and reported.

We now had all our data complete and only required to be again at the foot of the climb to test its sufficiency.

It was our intention to cross the corrie to the Bhasteir Tooth, where I had left my camera the

previous day. I wished to take a photo of the Lota Corrie face of the Tooth, after which we could try conclusions with our Third Pinnacle climb in returning to Sligachan.

We accordingly scrambled quickly over the Third and Fourth Pinnacles to the gully between the latter and Sgurr nan Gillean. This is the easiest of the Pinnacle gullies, and is filled chiefly with scree and large boulders. However, it is worth remembering that up it lies the quickest route from Sligachan to the top of Sgurr nan Gillean. We were strolling leisurely downward when we noticed a heavy shower hanging over Portree, and it then became a race as to which should arrive first at Bhasteir Tooth. It proved a dead heat; really a win for the shower because photography was impossible until it subsided. We sat in shelter in Bhasteir Nick Gully for about an hour, when the rain gave place to snow and thick mist. Alas for our photograph and climb! They had to be deferred until another day.

This came on July 2, 1906. It was blazing hot, and the rocks were warm and dry. Much time was taken over the photograph, and it was not until 6 P.M. that we reached the foot of the Third Pinnacle.

After roping at the cairn, Harland led us up the chimney and by the face to our old acquaintance—the ledge at the foot of the slab. A knowledge of what was above led to a change in our base of attack. Instead of trying from the right-hand side, as before, our leader struck straight up the vertical rock about midway along the ledge. A small cairn now marks the exact spot. Steadily his rope was

taken out foot by foot, until fully 60 feet had gone. He was evidently directly above our heads. A pebble he sent down dropped straight outside of us and bounded from the edge of our ledge, striking nothing further till it reached the corrie below. Still another 10 feet of rope disappeared, and then came down a distant shout that he was on the upper ledge. It was my turn.

From the cairn I scrambled across about a yard to the right, and then a short sloping slab brought me to the sheer nose of the Pinnacle. Good holds led upwards—rough gabbro which held hands and feet in perfect security. The way was unmistakable up this line of holds, and for 30 feet was not difficult, though very steep, to the first resting-place—a small recess containing a sharp spike of rock for the hands.

I then had time to look round. What a place it was, to be sure! On either side were steep weather-worn slabs, rough in texture, but smooth in general contour and singularly devoid of definite holds; immediately above was a sharp corner, and beyond this the foot of the cave. Over the edge, and directly below, I surprised Binns, seen at a most unusual angle, comfortably blowing smoke rings into the still air at the starting point; apparently straight beneath him, for his head and shoulders were relieved against them, were the slabs, boulders, and loch in the corrie. It was the Skye ideal of a climber's view.

The next part was the most exposed and difficult. A few feet upward brought me to a good handhold on the right edge, but, though large and firm, it was awkwardly placed and tended to

destroy the balance. At first it could only be used to steady with. A foothold, a small, firmly wedged spike of rock, had to be trusted entirely. It was necessary to change feet upon this to allow of the right foot working up the edge on to what had been the awkwardly placed handhold; this gave an excellent standing-place, where there was opportunity for a much-needed "breather." Then started a narrow sloping crack—the one I had seen from above—in which the right foot could be wedged while the hands grasped good holds on the rough edge. This was about 20 feet high, and was awkward at one point only; but at that height anything approaching difficulty was appreciated to the full.

The rocks then became more riven and splintered, and it was a comparatively simple matter to pull up over the edge to where Harland was seated, looking very content and well pleased with himself.

And well he might, for the successful accomplishment of a slab like that brings in its train greater satisfaction than success in any other branch of sport that I know. A well-hit drive at golf, the winning stroke of a cricket-match, a hard-run "try" are all wonderful things, and I have no desire to undervalue them; but, perhaps in part because the stake may have been bigger, the first ascent of the crux of a good climb far transcends them.

We threw the rope to Binns, and before long he joined us on our ledge, where we built a small cairn.

I fear my account must verge somewhat on the

sensational, but that slab *is* sensational, more so even than the direct ascent of the Eagle's Nest Arête on Great Gable, which it somewhat resembles. But this slab on the Third Pinnacle is just as much within the line that divides the safe from the dangerous as the Eagle's Nest Arête is outside of it.

Directly above us was the cave. About 20 feet upward brought us to its interior. And here our ardour got somewhat damped. I knew we were within 15 feet of the point to which I had descended, and thought that our success was assured. But Harland traversed about 5 feet outward, where the holds ceased altogether, and still the roof of the cave overhung him. Perhaps he had started wrongly; he came back and rested. Then he worked outwards again, more warily this time, but stopped at the same point. We were holding his rope from inside, so could see but little of what went on.

"Rush it," we advised him; "it's only about 10 feet!"

"How can I rush it?" he panted; "the wretched thing overhangs, and there's no hold."

It was most exasperating. He came back again, somewhat spent. To give him a rest, I worked outward to have a look round. It certainly appeared hopeless. With feet wedged uncertainly on one side and my hands pressing on the other in a most helpless position, it seemed apparent, as I looked upward, that the place was inaccessible. There did not appear to be a hand- or foot-hold within 5 feet, and even at that height nothing definite. There was no spike over which to throw a rope;

so reduced were we that even this would have been tried.

I joined the majority in the cave, and a lugubrious gathering it was! I had thought about giving a shoulder to Harland, and had really gone outside to see if this could be done, but there decided that I could not safely hold his weight without falling outwards. And then came the solution. I went out again and told the others to pull my rope tight. This they did, and I found by leaning outwards on its support and some small footholds that my position was really quite secure.

Binns tied me to a spike of rock in the cave, and then held the rope while Harland climbed outward. He quickly scrambled on to my shoulders, keeping his balance by pressing against the wall until he attained an upright position. This gave him an extra 5 feet of height, just sufficient, after a very hard struggle, to solve the problem.

To be in accordance with precedent, I suppose we should have "yelled ourselves hoarse" when our leader shouted that he was up. But we did nothing of the sort. I went back into the cave and rubbed the various parts of my anatomy that were not too tender to be handled, and then tossed up with Binns as to who should go next. The one who won would have the benefit of a shoulder. Fortune came my way, and after affording Binns a perfectly luxurious time, I left the comparative comfort of his shoulder and struggled upward to where Harland had my rope passed round a good "belay."

Then our "sheet-anchor" came along in great style; first a wildly groping hand, which finished its wanderings by grasping the rope, then an excited countenance, followed after a struggle by a much contorted body, and he was by our side, breathless.

That 15-foot stretch of climbing was very severe, but was rendered immune from anything serious in the way of an accident by the rope anchored inside the cave. It is one of the places that any party might try with safety. The weaker the party the less likely would they be to hurt themselves, for they would not get high enough!

But the slab below is not for a weak party, although it should be within the power of any really capable, experienced leader. It is for this reason that my account of the climb has run to such a length. It is the usual thing in describing a stiff first ascent to do it so carefully that none but the greatest duffer could possibly fail to follow it, and then to finish up with a solemn warning to all and sundry that on no account should the ascent be repeated.

I hope I have complied with the first requirement; the second I must violate, and say that I hope strong parties of climbers will atone for their long neglect of this face of the Third Pinnacle, and devote to it the attention which it undoubtedly merits.

To return to our ascent, the remainder seemed very easy after what had been done. An interesting stretch of chimney climbing brought us to a

small, bridged rock, under which we crept, and then struck off to the right up broken rocks for about 200 feet, joining the ordinary route up the Third Pinnacle a few feet below the summit. The length of the climb is about 650 feet.

It was now 9 P.M. We rested on the top of the Pinnacle, and were loth to turn our steps down to Sligachan. It was perfect sitting up there in the still air, watching the sunset over the sea.

The gabbro walls of the Second Pinnacle presented a bare, sweeping foreground of rock, outlined against miles of brown moorland, here and there relieved by patches of vivid green, or silvered by small unnamed lochs. Still farther away and bordering this picture, so complete of nature's loneliness, were the toy-like houses, the wooded slopes, and the bay of Portree.

Away across the Minch, glistening a pale violet colour in the slowly fading light, were the distant hills of Lewis and Harris. What a mystic spell there seemed to be about those distant Hebrides! On the glittering breast of the sea they looked as though of a different world. It seemed hardly credible that at their feet our fellow-men were tilling the ground, mending their fishing-nets, or in other fashion fulfilling each his own particular destiny. And surely not even the perfect fulfilment of the highest destiny could bring to any one more genuine and abiding joy than the contemplation of such a view as this. Ah yes, though, to a rock-climber the joy would be still greater that was enhanced by the successful accomplishment of a hard-fought climb.

However, it was growing darker, so we clam-

bered down quickly to the easy gully between the First and Second Pinnacles.

This contains only two or three short, simple pitches, down which we slithered and jumped to the broken ground below, and thence across the moor homewards.

The above account was written at Sligachan the day after our ascent. Quite by chance I subsequently learnt that Mr. W. C. Slingsby had led a party up this face. I immediately wrote to him for particulars, and those with which he kindly supplied me leave no doubt that his party had done, with but little variation, the climb above described, in the spring of 1890.

His account of how they climbed out of the cave is of interest as showing that there are other methods of overcoming the difficulty than those resorted to by us. His companions were Messrs. G. Hastings and E. Hopkinson. "After surmounting a very steep slab with small holds, we came to a short, deeply-cut chimney ending in a cavern. Here was the difficulty, and a real one too. An overhanging lip had to be surmounted; but how? Hopkinson went up into the cavern and held tight the rope while Hastings and I built up an insecure footstool of stones about eighteen inches high. On this Hastings stood, held by Hopkinson with the rope. I climbed on Hastings' knee, then his shoulder, and tried for handholds; but all in vain. I was then shoved up a bit farther, and got my right elbow in a little corner which sufficed to give me the necessary leverage. Hastings steadied me with his axe. This enabled me to surmount a really bad place,

above which I soon reached good ground, and the others followed."

An ice-axe would be a most useful implement in overcoming such a place, and future parties might be well-advised to include one in their outfit when tackling this particular climb.

CHAPTER III

THE CLIMBS ON THE FIRST PINNACLE— SGURR NAN GILLEAN

THE steep rocks of the face of the First Pinnacle, which overlook Corrie Riabhach, contain some first-rate climbing.

To those who bemoan the remoteness of Sligachan from the climbs, it will come as a pleasant surprise to hear that within a walk of an hour and a half is one of the best gullies on the island. This can be seen from the inn, and shows as a black vertical gash. To the left of it can be discerned the outline of another gully, and I think that it must have been up the left-hand wall of this that Messrs. Naismith, Collie, and Howell climbed in 1896.

The description of their climb says: "The way is difficult to describe, but it followed generally the line of a rib or buttress, which runs north-east from the First Pinnacle to the head of Corrie Riabhach. After passing some easy rocks the party attacked a steep face of excellent rock, immediately to the left of a gully, visible from Sligachan as a vertical cut. Subsequently crossing some scree they ascended a 40-foot chimney, and a nearly vertical wall just above it, on the top of which a small cairn was left."

I have hunted in vain for that cairn, and, be-

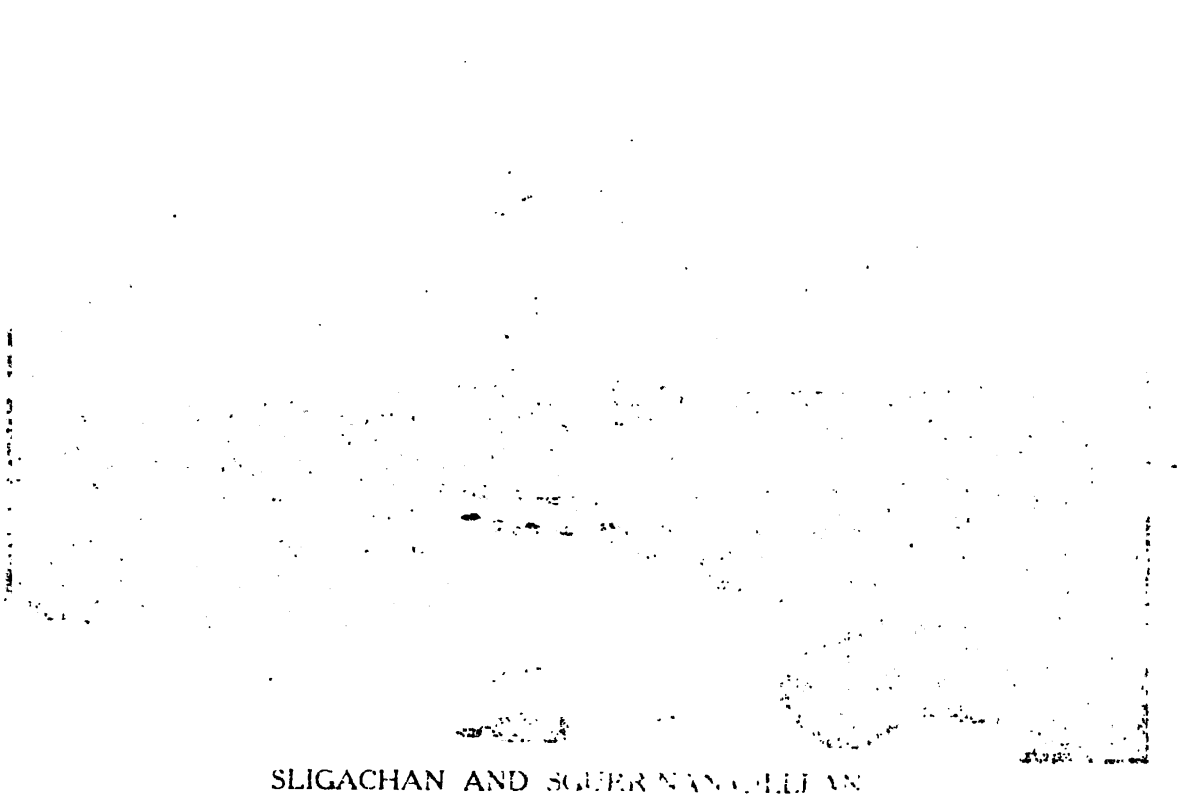
cause the climb up the buttress of the left-hand gully bears a strong resemblance to the one described above, have come to the conclusion that it must have been swept away. However, another now stands on what, I think, must have been its site.

The Black Chimney—First Pinnacle.—The usual approach to the First Pinnacle lies along the rounded rocky ridge which is defined on the Sgurr a'Bhasteir side by the steep cliff that plunges down into the Bhasteir Burn, rendered famous by the exploit of three well-known mountaineers who swam up it. If, when about a couple of hundred feet away from the point where this ridge abuts on the First Pinnacle, the climber looks to its northern side, he cannot fail to observe this steep, deeply-cut Black Chimney.

It had often "taken my eye" when passing to climbs further afield, but it was not until June 1907 that a suitable opportunity arose of inspecting it closely.

The day was wet, speaking "wi'out preejudice," even a Highlander would have admitted that it was raining. My party had arrived at Sligachan less than twenty-four hours before, and the chimney was obviously difficult. Failure was almost a foregone conclusion. We had come out for exercise, however, and cared little whether a climb accrued or not.

After reaching the foot of the First Pinnacle a ledge was followed around and downward to the left, which brought us to a platform immediately below the chimney. Intervening between it and us was an expanse of slabby rock.



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SLIGACHAN AND SGURR NAN GILLEAN.

A crack running up it was the obvious means of reaching our climb; this was not difficult, but served to emphasise the fact that it was our first day on the rocks.

Straight above our heads, when we reached the top of the slabs, overhung the chimney. Drops of water fell from its crest downward for a considerable distance before striking the rocks. The prospect was not encouraging, but the rope was put on and we started upward.

The first 50 feet were very steep, but good holds were found on the various chockstones, and the going was fairly comfortable, until a big, loosely-wedged splinter barred the way. After climbing to its under side a traverse was made to the left to a commodious ledge on the face of the cliff. On this we foregathered, and then our leader stepped back into the chimney above the splinter, a somewhat awkward manœuvre.

When all were across, an easy scramble upward brought us to a small cave, the floor of which sloped steeply downward. Its roof overhung our heads, but the right wall presented a foothold far out. This and a small hitch at the back of the cave warranted our leader in proceeding. After backing up for a yard or so he was able to get across to the foothold, using my shoulder as an intermediate step, and soon after disappeared from sight above us.

By leaning outwards as far as possible I could just discern the top of the chimney. It was about 30 feet above and overhung our heads to an alarming extent, the water from its crest dropping right outside of us. I had just come to the conclusion

that it was much too difficult in its present state, and was on the point of shouting up to the leader to this effect, when a great black object suddenly hove in sight over the crest of the chimney. Instinctively we ducked our heads inside and turned away, thinking it was a falling stone, but on looking round the next moment a wonderful sight met our gaze. There, directly above, and within a few feet of us, with pinions stretched to the full, was a magnificent golden eagle. For an appreciable period it hung poised over us, until it seemed that it took us for prey, and was hovering before a "stoop." In reality it had not seen us. We gazed fascinated, and realised some of the feelings that prevent a rabbit or small bird from fleeing for their life.

Then the spell was broken by our leader, who had evidently not seen the eagle.

"Hi! you fellows, this won't go to-day," he shouted.

The juxtaposition of the sublime and the ridiculous was too great. We burst into laughter, and the huge bird above became a tumbled mass of rustling feathers, emitted a wild screech, which our friend above afterwards told us nearly startled the life out of him, and wheeled back whence it had come. Eagles are still quite common in Skye, and I have observed as many as eight during one holiday, but it must be seldom that this magnificent bird is seen to such advantage as upon that day. The beautiful feathers on its breast, and the faint beating of its wings as it moved its head from side to side, hanging there majestically in the airy silence, were things to remember.

A few moments later our friend from above rejoined us. We then climbed down the chimney, and thence around to the ordinary route up the First Pinnacle, from which we attained the top of the chimney. A hasty survey from above disclosed a small stone wedged in its upper extremity—the only thing that encouraged the idea of trying it again on a fine day—and then the storm drove us back to the inn.

Three weeks later Mr. H. Harland and I returned to the attack. The conditions were now perfect, and we climbed quickly upward to the small cave below the top chimney. After shouldering him up, I joined my companion above the cave.

A small recess, barely large enough to accommodate the two of us, formed the base of our operations. The chimney had here dwindled to a narrow crack, which overhung our heads very considerably. Above us its walls were absolutely holdless, but a sloping ledge on the right suggested a means of circumventing them. This ledge was on the sheer face of the cliff, however, and after passing along it for a few feet the holds sloped outward to such an extent, besides being somewhat unstable, that we were glad to return to the comparative safety of our recess. We were forced to play the game fairly; there was no alternative to climbing straight up the crack.

The small wedged stone we had noticed on our previous visit was the key to the situation. Harland unroped and pushed me upwards until I could reach to pass the loose end over the stone, and down on the inside to him, after which he tied on again.

The stone was quite firmly wedged, and with our rope passed round it we were now in a position of safety, and ready for the next move. Accordingly I stepped along the traverse until directly below the top of the crack, in which was wedged another stone, apparently the only hold it contained. Harland mounted to my shoulder, intending to reach this, but it proved to be nearly a foot beyond his grasp. Other assistance there was none; it was impossible to wedge his foot or knee in the crack, for it overhung too much. He therefore clambered back again, and we readjusted our ideas. There was no deception about the place. That top stone must be reached—but how? And, if he got his hands on it, could he pull up over the edge without hold for his feet? At all events, our threaded rope minimised the danger, and he determined to try.

This time I climbed up to the lower wedged stone, and there, held in by the rope, succeeded in jamming the right foot across and attaining a firm position, albeit one of much discomfort.

Quickly Harland climbed up inside, and then stepped out to my shoulder.

"I've got it," he gasped, and the next moment, after releasing about a yard of rope, he swung out on his hands on the top wedged stone and pulled upward, I in the meantime pushing his foot with my right hand, thus conserving his strength for the final struggle. Thanks to the fitness engendered by a strenuous climbing holiday, his arms took the strain successfully, and, after much spasmodic kicking with his feet, he got his chest over the edge. After a short "breather," another struggle took

him upward from my sight, and I knew that, as far as he was concerned, the Black Chimney had capitulated.

He now took in my slack, after which I unroped, pulled the free end from behind the stone, and tied it round my waist again. Our communication was now uninterrupted, and there remained only to pull up on the rope until I could attain the top stone. This was a painful process; the memory of it even is unpleasant, so why dwell on it? Suffice it to say that I at length appreciated the reason why Owen Jones' friend stigmatised "dangling" as "infernal," and that shortly afterwards I found myself seated beside my companion on the screes above the chimney, exhausted with a great exhaustion, which, however, was as nothing compared to his!

Those top few feet entailed about as severe a strain as could well be imagined. It is one of the few places that I have come across which positively demand combined tactics. On many of the "exceptionally severe" climbs the shoulder given on the first ascent has subsequently been found to be unnecessary, but I feel sure that unless a party is prepared to combine at this point they will save themselves disappointment by not essaying the climb.

There are certain climbers who regard combined tactics as unsportsmanlike; in some cases they would even prefer to turn back from a climb rather than give or accept a shoulder. Those who read this book will soon notice that their tenets are not shared by the writer. To me one of the greatest charms of climbing is the atmosphere of besieger

and besieged that pervades it. The climbing party are the attackers, and the particular gully or ridge they are assaulting is in very truth "their friend the enemy"; and any means short of running risks, or disfiguring a climb by cutting artificial steps, should be resorted to in order to vanquish him. The trite saying that "union is strength" applies particularly when the bond is an Alpine rope. The party should be a unit; every member should contribute his share towards success, and not leave all the work to the leader: thus are very difficult places not only climbed, but climbed with safety. Could any one imagine the guides Venetz, Burgener, Lauener, or any of the great amateur rock-climbers turning back defeated, because they were "nice" about giving a shoulder or pushing each other up? Moreover, on a new climb it is my humble opinion that a shoulder should be given, not only to help the leader when he sticks, but also to conserve his strength for the upper part of a pitch, where, perhaps, he cannot be safely assisted. In the highest development of the sport the place of second man on the rope is one which demands almost as much skill and steadiness as is necessary on the part of the leader. A careful perusal of the accounts of many of the first-rate climbs will disclose the fact that combination, not individual brilliancy, was the factor that most contributed to success. I well remember once being on the rope with two experts and one humble "worshipper at the shrine," who watched the experts very closely for some time, and amused them vastly by exclaiming, "It's not your climbing I admire; it's the way

you outwit all the difficulties with your shoulders and rope!"

To return to the chimney which prompted the above, after resting a while, we made our way up a short pitch, which landed us out on the broken rocks slightly to the left of the usual route up the First Pinnacle.

The Sligachan Gully.—This is the best course on the Corrie Riabhach face of the First Pinnacle. One might almost go further and say that it is the best on Sgurr nan Gillean.

It is most quickly reached by ascending the Bhasteir Corrie side of the Pinnacle (the usual route) for about 40 feet, and then contouring around to the left, above the top of the Black Chimney, until the open mountain side is reached.

On looking straight across from here a prominent gully will be noticed, containing a chock-stone pitch and a right-hand branch near the top. This is the Forked Gully. Up its left-hand wall lies the climb done by Messrs. Naismith, Collie, and Howell.[1] To the right of it the crags are very steep, but are cleft by a narrow gully—the black vertical rift so easily discernible from the inn. The rift ceases abruptly at its lowest extremity, being blocked by a wedge-shaped boulder which forms the first pitch. This overhangs and is somewhat difficult to negotiate without help of an impulsive nature from a friend below. After our tussle in the upper part of the Black Chimney it seemed quite mild, however, and, ere long, we found ourselves fairly in the gully. This first pitch can be avoided by keeping up a ledge to the right

[1] See p. 41.

for a few feet, and then traversing back to the left until the gully is regained. In wet weather this is the better route.

The second pitch was formed by a sloping chimney which could be climbed either direct or by keeping away a yard or two on the right wall. Here the holds were good and well spaced, and took us gaily upward to a wide opening in the crags.

The main gully continued straight ahead and, although mossy and spanned by huge boulders, looked deceptively easy. To the right was a shattered pinnacle, on to which we clambered and surveyed the surrounding crags. Across at the far side of the gully up which we had come, were two very narrow parallel chimneys running upward to the top of the retaining wall. As a subsequent visit proved, both of these provide excellent sport. The lower one, that to the left, contains two chock-stone pitches near its foot. Above these the walls narrow, and it is a pretty climb to a narrow hole at its top, caused by some rocks jammed between the walls. The right-hand chimney is not unlike its companion. Two easy pitches give access to the deeply cut walls, which are placed just the right distance apart for backing up. When about half-way up, the holds on the right wall cease and it becomes necessary to reverse the position and face in the opposite direction, a somewhat awkward process. Once accomplished, however, it is a fairly easy matter to "back up" outside some wedged blocks to the top of the pitch. This is succeeded by a similar chimney to that just climbed, above which the skyline is soon reached.

A steep wall of rough gabbro then faces one, and gives good sport until the broken rocks are reached some little distance below the top of the Pinnacle.

Better than either of these is the main gully, however, although the chimneys will always be passed with reluctance.

Whilst sitting on our Pinnacle we deplored the fact that the gully and chimneys had no names. Straight across the moor lay the inn.

"Why not call them Sligachan Gully and the Parallel Chimneys?" asked my companion. "Certainly," I concurred. "Sligachan Gully and the Parallel Chimneys they are!" And I hope other climbers will approve of the names.

After which momentous decision we scrambled down from our perch and across to the foot of a smooth narrow chimney, which constituted the next pitch. This gave considerable trouble. The general angle was very steep, and the holds sloped outwards. About 8 feet up was a jammed stone, which proved to be firm, and Harland steadied me until I could grasp it; then a stiff struggle upward, during which gabardine, gabbro, and some thick moss near the top exchanged many civilities, brought me to a scree patch below an impending boulder.

After the second man had joined me we climbed up the corner formed by the junction of the boulder with the right wall of the gully, and unexpectedly found ourselves beneath another great rock which overhung a most beautiful cave. Its floor was the top of the boulder we had just passed, and was carpeted inches thick with dry moss, bilberry bushes, and juniper. Inside it and on the walls

we counted seventeen different kinds of plants; it was surely such a place as an Alpine botanist sees in his dreams.

But what rendered it so unique was its wonderful situation, and the setting it afforded to the view outward. Overhanging our heads was the great boulder already mentioned. The floor of the cave, and the flora drooping down its walls, merged into the rocks farther out, and framed an exquisite view of Loch Sligachan across Corrie Riabhach. Glamaig, flat-topped Raasay, with the sound of Sleat and the mountains of the mainland, dominated away in the distance by Ben Nevis, formed a picture in fit keeping with its setting.

An hour slipped away unnoticed, and then most reluctantly we climbed out of the cave, up the right-hand side of the huge stone that formed its roof. Thence an easy pitch landed us on a scree terrace within a few feet of the top of the First Pinnacle. After building a cairn at the top of the gully, we went across to the right and descended by way of a boulder-filled branch gully to Bhasteir Corrie.

CHAPTER IV

THE CLIMBS FROM BHASTEIR CORRIE

In common with its four outlying pinnacles, Sgurr nan Gillean throws down into Bhasteir Corrie a formidable cordon of steep cliffs.

For about 300 feet above the corrie those of Sgurr nan Gillean rise almost perpendicularly, but long dykes of softer rock have weathered out and seamed the face with deeply-cut vertical gashes. At a casual glance these would appear to offer numerous routes to the glacis of the upper cliff, but a closer inspection of some of the most likely of them shows that they are not yet ready for the climber. The weathering-out process is not quite complete: between perpendicular walls of gabbro are still wedged great masses of undercut, friable, trap-rock.

In two notable instances, however, the weathering has been more rapid and has bitten deep into the face of the cliff, thus forming two most typical chimneys. These have both been climbed, and afford sport that is of the very best. The lower of the two—the Forked Chimney—gives out on a broad ridge which leads directly to the top of the peak, while the other—the Deep Chimney—lands the climber at a point about half-way up the Western Ridge. Immediately to the right of the Deep Chimney is a huge recess in the crags, up

which two routes have been made; these are called the Jammed Block Chimney and the Doctor's Chimney. Leading up obliquely to the right from the foot of the latter is the easiest way from the corrie to the Western Ridge. This was used as a means of descent by the late Sheriff Nicolson many years ago and is now called after him, Nicolson's Chimney. It is generally taken by those who lack the time or inclination to effect the passage of the *Gendarme*. Two or three short chimneys immediately below the *Gendarme* have also been climbed, but, occurring as they do in the vicinity of much better courses, they are but seldom done.

The Forked Chimney.—The foot of this is about 50 feet to the right of the gully between Knight's Peak and Sgurr nan Gillean. Almost immediately the foot of the gully is left, a narrow chimney starts upward, but this ceases on the wall of Sgurr nan Gillean and leads nowhere in particular. John Mackenzie tells me he has climbed it, and that it is a "bittock deeficult." There is no record of its having been climbed, however, and since it has been decreed that a man cannot be credited with a first ascent unless he has duly recorded it somewhere or other, the first ascent of this still remains to be done; which would seem just a little rough on John!

I remember once passing by it late one October's evening, and one of our party was most insistent that we should climb it. We argued that this would take too long, and that it looked difficult. "Nothing of the sort," said he, "half an hour would be plenty of time. Why, we could just run up it!"

We accordingly professed ourselves willing to wait below while he inspected it. After much trouble he got to the top of the first pitch, and then about 8 feet up the next portion. Here he not only stopped, but shouted for one of us to help him back. A friend quickly went to his assistance and offered his shoulder as a step down, afterwards commenting on his peculiar conception of the verb "to run." The place looks stiff.

The Forked Chimney is the next opening to the right; even in mist one cannot miss it. For the initial hundred feet the rocks are just sufficiently wide apart for the purpose of backing up. Several jammed boulders span it at intervals; most of these can be passed on either side, but the outside route is invariably the less arduous, and does not lead to complications with the rope. We were a party of five when I first climbed it, and loose splinters of stone resting against the interior of the chimney rendered the inside route dangerous. Even outside, as we went, the last two members of the party were somewhat damaged, and had two or three very narrow escapes from being hit by large pieces. Not more than three should be on the climb at one time.

The chimney forks above a pitch about 30 feet high, the left-hand fork being the one usually taken. The other has been climbed, but a description I read of it in *Blackwood's Magazine* does not encourage a repetition. After climbing up the right-hand fork with great difficulty, "the leader took out a full hundred feet of the rope but found no hitch, and the second man had to follow on some 20 feet to a craggy ledge to allow him to

climb higher to a safe halting-place. The two successive occupants of the ledge will not soon forget it, for, if the middle man had slipped while the leader was still climbing, nothing on earth could have held the party."

The left-hand fork did not necessitate any climbing of this sort. Shortly after the divide the chimney became more deeply cut, and in penetrating to its interior we found ourselves stopped by the roof of a cave which overhung our heads for several feet. However, it was not difficult to attain a position with the back on the right wall and the feet on the other, and in this attitude traverse outward and upward to the lip of the overhang, where a deep hole in the chimney wall afforded breathing space before proceeding. The next move took us outside the cave, and thence it was fairly easy, although the situation was very exposed, to "back up" to good anchorage. The chimney then forked again, but the continuation up to the left gave the better sport. The lower contingent of our party took the right-hand branch, and arrived first at the point where the forks coalesce about 40 feet higher. Above this the going was easier, and broken rocks took us quickly upwards, sometimes on an indefinite ridge, at others over steep scree, to the glacis of the upper cliff.

It was already getting late, so in order to save time we traversed across the face to the Western Ridge. The mountain was shrouded in mist, and, while resting a while before descending, one of us produced a compass and took our bearings.

"Surely," he exclaimed, "we cannot be on the Western Ridge at all." I knew its character

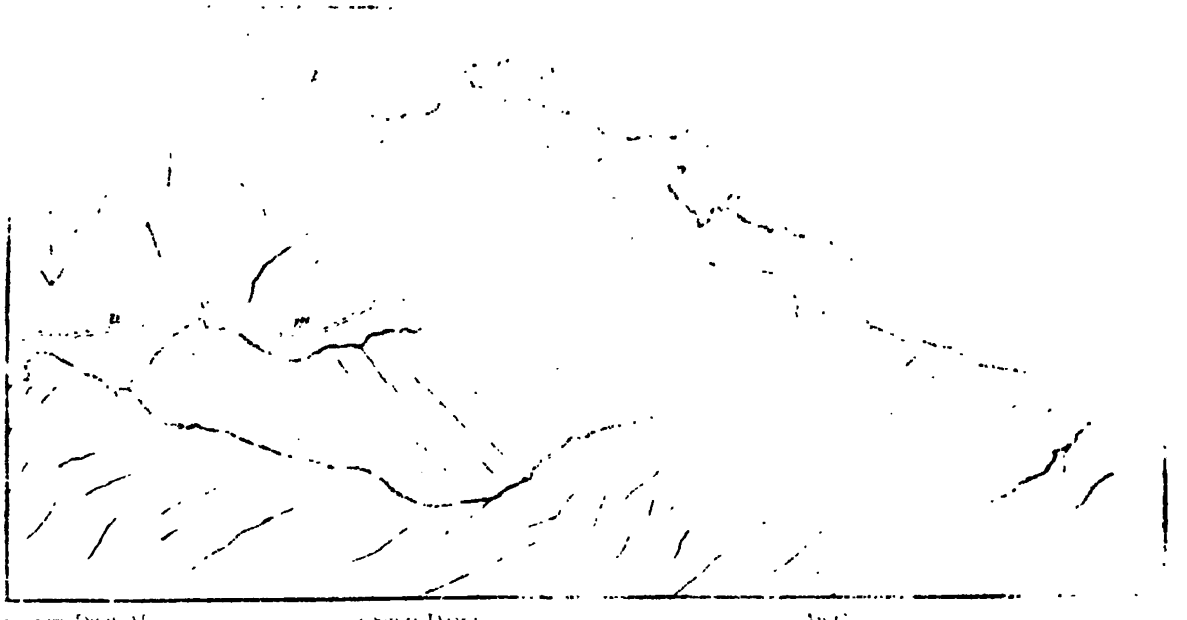
well, however, and recognised several minor landmarks.

"Which do you say is north, then?" inquired he of the compass. And I pointed to the north.

"Why, you're pointing due south," he said. I was sitting on a rock about a couple of yards away. He threw the compass across so that I might be convinced of my mistake, and on taking the reading I found that it corroborated my opinion. I thought he must have mistaken the points of the needle, and went across to show him; then, on reading the compass again, I found that it had swung right round and was pointing due south instead of north! The explanation was, of course, that the rocks were strongly magnetic, but I had never seen such a well-marked deflection from the right line. I have since taken friends to the exact spot, and within a distance of 6 feet the compass gave exactly opposite readings.

To those who may be lost in the Coolin, and intend to extricate themselves by the aid of their compass, the above incident is worth bearing in mind. Students of Alpine literature will remember that Professor Tyndall observed a similar phenomenon on the Riffelhorn.

The Deep Chimney.—A few feet to the right of the start of the Forked Chimney a well-marked opening occurs in the crags. This is blocked low down by a mass of smooth friable rock, at the top of which will be noticed a deep black cave, with overhanging roof. Still farther along is another opening, which is narrower, but which also possesses a similar cave. Neither of these places has been climbed. They appear to be inaccessible, but are



THE COOLIN FROM BRUACH NA FRITHE.

mentioned here because of their prominent positions, and because I have seen no reference to them elsewhere. A wide rocky terrace leads upward past their foot, and if this be followed a wide recess will soon be reached, at a height of about 60 feet above the screes of the corrie.

In the extreme left-hand corner of the recess is a black vertical rift, spanned by several jammed boulders. This is the Deep Chimney, and contains about 300 feet of first-rate climbing. It is bridged at its entrance by a wedged boulder under which one can creep to the back of the chimney. The walls are about a couple of feet apart, and so continue upwards for about 30 feet, where is another boulder. This is best passed on the outside, and then a stretch similar to that just climbed gives out on a sloping scree patch at the foot of a deeply cut chimney, which supports between its walls a number of jammed boulders.

It is about 90 feet in height, and is a sample of what every good chimney ought to be. It is just the right width for backing up; the left wall gives good holds for the feet, while that on the right is smooth and holdless, allowing the back to slide up it without undue friction. The boulders spanning it at various stages add to the pleasure of the ascent, and if the leader passes behind some and in front of others, his rope acts as a most perfect safeguard, for it is threaded as he goes upward. It is very steep, and the situations, when outside the particular boulder which is being passed, are very airy and exhilarating.

For 40 feet the climber sails gaily upward to the lowest of the jammed boulders, passing behind

and then above two of them, and horizontally outwards. A few feet higher a return to the depths of the chimney can be effected. The climber is here so far inside that for some distance it is almost like ascending a vertical tunnel. He passes behind several blocks which are wedged across, and before long attains the top of the pitch. This is a commodious rock-terrace on the face of the cliff, upon which was found the cairn left by the party that made the first ascent. It will afford some idea of the steepness of the place when I state that one of my party disturbed a stone, when about half-way up the chimney, and it fell clear, striking nothing until it came into contact with the scree at the foot of the climb.

From the outward end of the terrace the wall can be scaled straight upward, a very exposed bit of face-work over rock which provides good holds. In looking downwards for one's footholds near the top, the scree floor of the Deep Chimney is discernible directly below. Those who do not favour such places can continue straight up the chimney. This is dominated at the top by a firm jammed boulder, above which easy scrambling soon takes one to the upper side of a prominent rock-tower on the Western Ridge.

Messrs. C. T. C. Beecroft and P. R. Parkinson were probably the first to note the possibilities of this climb, and made its ascent in October 1906.

The Jammed Block Chimney.—This begins immediately at the foot of the route just described, but its trend is somewhat to the right for a few feet, until a steep pitch blocks the way. This can be avoided by traversing along to the right at a

lower level, and thence returning to the gully above the pitch. It would be a pity to do this, however, in so short a climb; besides, the sharp struggle directly up the obstacle is quite enjoyable and leaves one with a cleaner conscience. A short distance higher, the gully is blocked by a great stone which is passed up the left-hand side. Above this are several wedged blocks forming a pitch about 25 feet high. When the party which first climbed the chimney (I think the word "gully" better describes it) attained this point they thought they had got into a cul-de-sac, but after climbing out upon the upper jammed block they found a simple way of turning the difficulty by scaling the face. A better way is to continue up the 30-foot chimney straight ahead. This affords a good finish to the climb and lands one out on the Western Ridge, about 150 feet above the Tooth.

The Doctor's Chimney.—In the same recess as the Jammed Block Chimney, and running upward almost parallel with it, is an easier edition of the same climb. Its lowest extremity is about 40 feet to the right of the companion climb and starts quite mildly.

Those who expect to find climbing of like excellence to that of the famous Lakeland chimney of the same name will be disappointed. Many medical men are climbers, and a great number have attained to great proficiency in the sport; it is somewhat unfair to connect them with the climb under consideration. Nevertheless, it affords a pleasant enough scramble, albeit of an easy nature, before giving out on the ridge a few feet below its Jammed Block neighbour.

Nicolson's Chimney.—The exact locality of this was not defined by Sheriff Nicolson, but he has left a record in the second volume of the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal* in which he says that, "his mode of progression was by crawling on his back." From this it would appear that he was able to descend face outward. A thorough exploration of the locality has disclosed only one place where the rocks are sufficiently easy to permit of this being done. So, by a process of exclusion, I have located his chimney as starting near the foot of the Doctor's Chimney, and running obliquely upward to the right to a sloping slab on the Western Ridge about 20 feet above the *Gendarme*.

Quite independently of my own conclusion, I asked John Mackenzie's opinion and he pointed me to the same place. As I have already suggested, it is the easiest way off the ridge, but beyond this fact and its historic connection with its discoverer, it possesses but little interest for the climber. A small cairn has for long stood on the slab at its top.

Knight's Peak from Bhasteir Corrie.—The Fourth Pinnacle of Sgurr nan Gillean springs upward from the corrie almost vertically for about 200 feet, above which its rocks are more broken, and the general angle becomes much easier. The lowest rampart has not been scaled directly from below, and indeed it is questionable whether such an ascent is within the bounds of possibility. In any case it would prove "a hard nut to crack," one which most climbers will be content to regard and pass by, feeling that they have missed nothing.

On the Sgurr nan Gillean side of Knight's Peak a subsidiary gully runs upward for a considerable distance, containing moderately easy climbing over slabby water-worn rock, and then sends off a fork to the left. Beyond the lower end of the fork the gully vanishes on easy ground, but higher has a continuation in a series of steep chimneys, the lowest of which is difficult. These give out on the ordinary route used when traversing the Pinnacle Ridge.

At the bottom of this subsidiary gully is a rounded boulder jammed between the walls. A few feet below it a shallow groove starts up the wall of Knight's Peak, and this affords the pleasantest introduction to the ascent from the corrie. The rocks are steep, but are of firm gabbro, and give excellent sport for 80 feet or so until a grass ledge is reached.

In trying to get across to the left to the nose of the ridge, we found the ledge trended downward and ceased below some overhanging rocks. Retracing our steps, the groove was followed upward for about 60 feet to another well-marked ledge. This continued right round and brought us out on a rock-platform immediately above the vertical sweep of the lowest rampart, where a small cairn was erected.

Two stretches of steep face climbing then took us upward to a spacious plateau, where an endless choice of routes presented themselves. This place can be reached from the gully between the Third Pinnacle and Knight's Peak by way of a long slab, but the route described is the better of the two. We selected a chimney in the middle of the but-

tress, which contained such a profusion of holds as quite to embarrass one, and soon attained the narrow upper ridge. Here the rock fell away somewhat from the strictest paths of rectitude, but afforded excellent sport, until the top of the Peak was gained.

Messrs. Stocker and Parker recorded their ascent of this west face of Knight's Peak as long since as 1886, but it is probable that the first ascent was made prior to that date.

The Gully between the Third Pinnacle and Knight's Peak.—Messrs. Lamb, Tattersall, Bowron, and Heap climbed this gully in June 1905. Probably no climb in the Coolin has so persistently turned back strong parties.

Being so near Sligachan and so seductive-looking withal, it is not surprising that nearly every visitor with pretensions to rock-craft should have wandered into its shades. A record of the names of those who tried it and were wise enough to turn back would serve no useful purpose, and might, by the uninitiated, be construed into a reflection upon the ability of those climbers. As a matter of fact, the chief difficulty is a vertical dyke of very rotten rock, overhanging a pitch about 100 feet in height. "A robust faith in shaky-looking holds seems to be one of the main qualifications for a successful ascent. Everything considered, it is not the sort of climb one would care to repeat." Thus one of the successful party summarises his impressions of the place.

After reading his account,[1] I felt that a descent on a rope from above would be, to say the least of

[1] *Rucksack Club Report*, November 1905.

it, desirable, before seriously attempting a repetition of their ascent. In accordance with this idea, I prevailed one day upon a lusty friend to accompany me over the Third Pinnacle and down to the top of the difficult pitch. Little was to be gained by climbing down the rotten dyke, so I swung down hand over hand on the rope until I reached a narrow ledge on the face of the vertical cliff. The ledge continued along for a few feet, and led into a cave under the top jammed boulder. This is not particularly difficult of attainment from below, and it is at this place that most of the unsuccessful parties have turned back. I then returned along the ledge to the foot of the dyke and attempted to climb upward. All one's energies could be concentrated on the actual ascent; the rope held from above neutralised the usual disturbing elements, such as the exposed nature of the place, the penalty of using unstable holds, and so on. But even so, that stretch of 15 feet was most disagreeable, and more than once reliance had to be placed on blocks of rock which quivered appreciably.

Like the above writer, I have no desire to repeat the ascent, even with a rope held from above; and this is not the feeling usually engendered by a good climb. In short, it is the kind of place that even the very finest climber who ever shed skin on gabbro might climb one day and fall off the next. Too few "exceptionally severe" courses have been recorded in Skye, and it is with great reluctance that I omit one of them from the list; but the gully under consideration must be placed *sui generis*, a decision in which the leader of the successful party

(and all credit to them for an unusually daring bit of climbing!) entirely concurs.

The Eagle's Nest Crag.—The ultra-gymnast who goes to Sligachan "trained to the last ounce" and haps upon bad weather will ofttimes be hard put to it to keep himself in condition, for the dearth of good boulders upon which to expend his energy is little short of astonishing.

In the exuberance of his spirits he has pulled most of the lime off the pillars that uphold the bridge, and, when he has not prematurely dropped off into the stream, has climbed their steep sides. He has even descended to feats of strength on a rope slung from the rafters in the smoke-room; and then, tiring of this, a tentative reference to the climbers' book has almost tempted him, in his desperation, to try to outvie the feat of a certain Gurkha who once ran to the top of Glamaig and back in fifty-five minutes—a performance which is duly recorded therein.

Did he but know it, a better way of spending his time would be to pay a visit to the Eagle's Nest Crag. This is situated on the lowest spur of the famous Pinnacle Ridge, a short half-hour's walk from the inn.[1] Almost in the centre of the crag is a black, deeply-cut gully, which contains, near its top, a 60-foot chock-stone pitch. Seen from the moor this looks very stiff, but a scramble up the mossy bed of the gully into the cave below it discloses a "through-route," which renders the pitch fairly easy. After the climber has emerged from this, a stiff climb of 30 feet or so up the right

[1] See outline drawing facing p. 5.

wall will prove more interesting even than destroying other people's bridges.

To the left of this gully a wide tongue of steep grass runs upward into a rocky corner, in which are two or three really good chimneys.

Further eastward still is a long shallow gully, which contains, besides much heather and long grass, a decent amount of entertaining climbing.

CHAPTER V

THE EXECUTIONER AND HIS TOOTH

THE two black, jagged rock-towers which, when viewed from Sligachan, appear on the skyline about midway between Sgurr nan Gillean and Sgurr a'Bhasteir, lie under the cloud of a very disagreeable name.

They were christened by some one whose regard for the expression of a resemblance was more truthful than poetic; the sort of person who, when shown one of your most artistic mountain pictures, immediately turns it wrong side up and exclaims, anent a certain small portion of it, "See! what a perfect resemblance to the Pope's head;" or, "Look at that bit of rock! It's just like an alligator!" It seems a pity that people of such a turn of mind should have been the first to christen a magnificent rock like Am Basteir and its Tooth.

But once such a name is given, its very gruesomeness will cause it to cling. So we must think of these two fine towers as things of impressive grandeur, feel delight in the joy they have given us, and be content to recall them by their Gaelic name, which to us might mean anything under the sun.

Am Basteir is a vastly bigger thing when viewed close at hand than would seem possible when seen from Sligachan. Its precipices on the north side

are very sheer, and must be over 200 feet high; on the other—the Lota Corrie side—they are on a still larger scale.

The smaller rock under its lee is Bhasteir Tooth, a pinnacle of bare and particularly firm gabbro, traversed by dykes of basalt and diabase. It was first climbed many years ago by Dr. J. N. Collie and John Mackenzie, who scrambled from Lota Corrie to the neck between Am Basteir and the Tooth, and thence along its easily inclined upper edge to the summit.

In following the main ridge along from Sgurr nan Gillean to Bruach na Frithe, it was always necessary, after climbing the Tooth, to retrace one's steps and descend into Lota Corrie. This involved a subsequent ascent of about 300 feet before the main ridge could be regained, an irksome proceeding, causing much useless loss of time and some little annoyance to those climbers who prefer to overcome difficulties rather than to go round them.

To Mr. W. W. Naismith belongs the distinction of "straightening out" this last bit of the main ridge. He led his party in August 1898 straight up the south face, so that nowadays parties can use his route in descending and find themselves, after a most delightful descent, still on the skyline, instead of away down in Lota Corrie with 300 feet of shifty scree between them and their desire.

The dark cave which separates Bhasteir from the Tooth is called Bhasteir Nick Gully. This provides a means of traversing the Tooth from north to south.

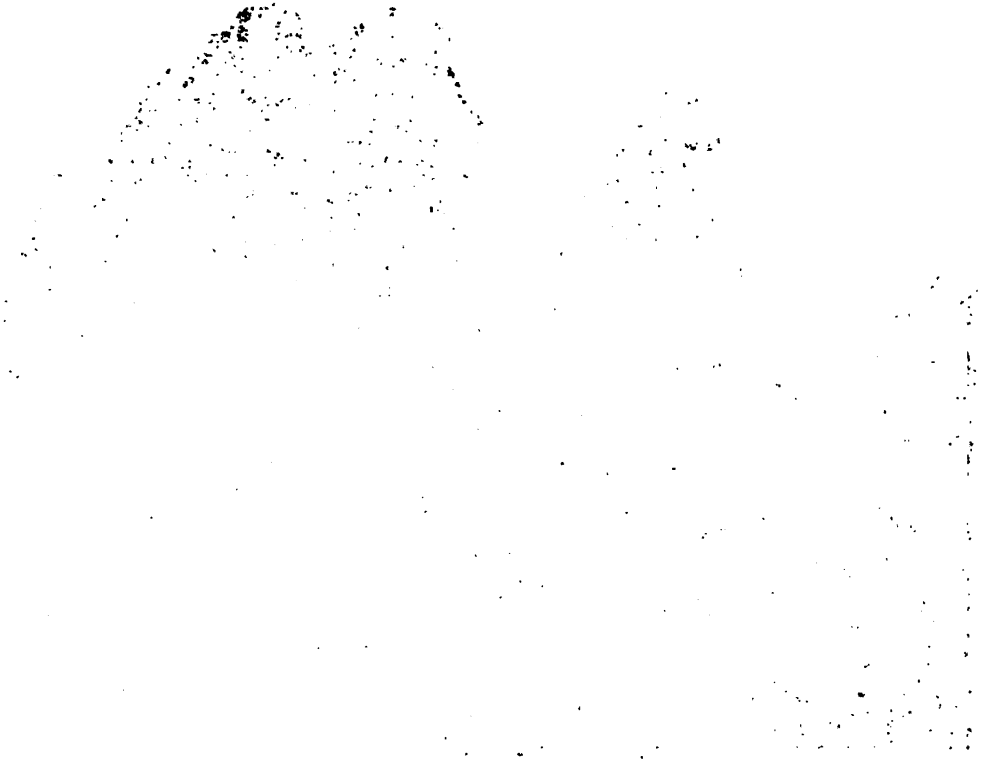
The ascent of Am Basteir itself is an easy

scramble up a somewhat exposed ridge, but when once the top is gained the character of the scene changes. Almost straight below is the broad upper edge of the Tooth, and intervening is a sheer precipice of about 80 feet.

The descent to the Tooth then lies on the south or Lota Corrie side of Am Basteir, where the rocks are more broken. A steep drop is immediately reached. This is usually negotiated by a free use of the rope, the last man down hitching it over a spike of rock. In taking the passage in a reverse direction, this short stretch is not quite so easy, and, if climbed unaided, is conducive to hard work. An alternative and more interesting route of ascent from this point will be found by retracing one's steps slightly, when, by way of an awkward corner on the right, a recess under a projecting boulder will be reached. This can be left, and the top soon attained by climbing the perpendicular right wall.

This short stretch is the only difficulty, and after it is passed the descent to the Tooth is just a scramble. Easy rocks then lead straight ahead to the top, where one is greeted by the small stone man built by Dr. Collie on his first ascent. On all sides the drop is, in the expressive letters of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, A. P. (absolutely perpendicular); nay, on one side it is O.H. (overhanging), and the feeling of airiness is delightful.

To lie on one's chest and look straight over the edge into Lota Corrie or Bhasteir Corrie will induce, in people whose "heads" are not very good, all those delightful thrills down the spine



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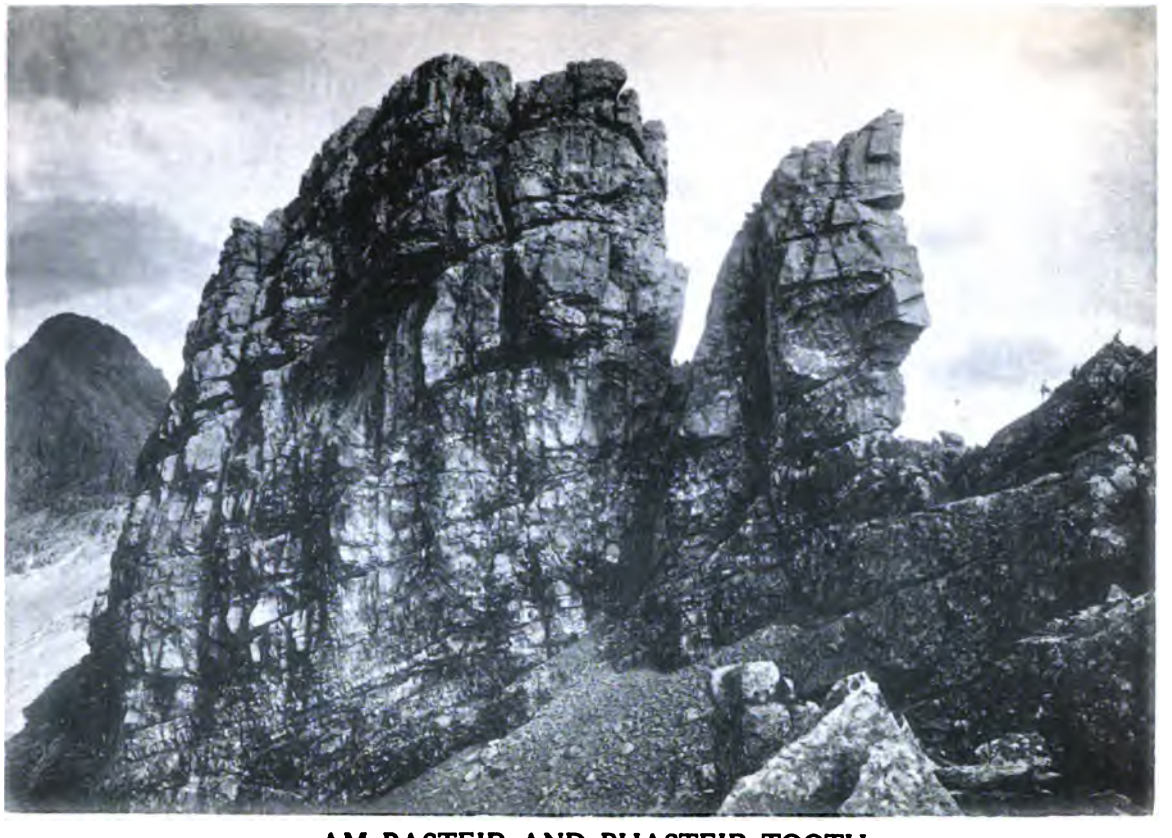


AM BASTEIR AND BHASTEIR TOOTH.

and sensations of wishing to throw themselves over which they say they feel when on a height. A look over the edge for half an hour every day for a week would work wonders in the way of a cure for these symptoms, I feel sure.

A medical friend who has studied the subject tells me that the cause is purely physiological and has nothing to do with the imagination. He says that the lack of any object near at hand, to break the focus of the eye, causes temporary paralysis of the cerebellum. May a remembrance of the reason prove a comfort when next these unpleasant feelings arise!

The easiest method of descending the Tooth is to retrace the route to the col, where a shallow chimney will be noticed leading downward into Lota Corrie. After following this for some considerable distance (it contains various kinds of enjoyable scrambling), a small stone man will be seen on a sloping rock. At this point it is usual to bear away to the left—in the direction of Sgurr nan Gillean—until an easy way presents itself downward to the screes in the corrie.

The Traverse of Bhasteir Tooth.—The latter days of June 1906 were preceded by a three weeks' drought. But alas! the drought disappeared with our advent on the 23rd, and we tramped our way up Fionn Corrie to the patter of heavy rain and the roar of streams in spate.

Two days previously we had been on the Pinnacles, and in returning found the Allt Dearg Mhor (Great Red Burn), the stream that runs out of Bhasteir Corrie, almost impassable. It was only to be done by wading, and my companions and

I spun a coin to decide which of us should ferry the others across on his back. Fate decreed that the task should fall to the most inadequate member of our party, a small man, who struggled valiantly to the middle of the stream, where the rush of water and a wobbly stone caused him to deposit his burden without warning in the deepest and wettest pool of the burn.

There are some rough stepping-stones by which to cross near the gamekeeper's house, but about 6 inches of water covers them in wet weather. There is a tradition of a bridge once having existed across the stream, but the bridge itself is, as any wandering crofter will tell you with a regretful shake of the head, "awa' wi' the fleud." Wherefore we decided to try to reach Bhasteir Tooth *viâ* Fionn Corrie, and, although slightly longer, this way is to be preferred when things are "a wee saft."

It was our intention thoroughly to investigate Bhasteir and the Tooth, ascending in the first place by Mr. Naismith's South Face route. We had heard wonderful accounts of it, frequently interlarded with the word "sensational," and expected great things.

As we neared the top of the corrie, however, the rain gave place to sleet; by the time Bealach nan Lice was reached, the wind was blowing a perfect hurricane and swirling the snowflakes around in a style that would have done credit to midwinter. We hurried to shelter on the Lota Corrie side of the ridge, and there did the only safe things the elements left to us—shivered under the lee of a boulder and ate our lunch. Our

prospect of a climb seemed to be fast disappearing. Occasionally the wind blew a rift in the clouds and we caught glimpses of the perpendicular face of the Tooth. It was plastered with snow; any unlucky mortal caught half-way up it would, we agreed, first freeze and then in the form of an icicle sail away on the breeze down into Harta Corrie!

For an hour we waited, and were just beginning to let our thoughts dwell on the cosy smoke-room at the inn, when we remembered the cave between Am Basteir and the Tooth. This faced north and, running deep into the mountain, would be quite sheltered.

Gathering up our "traps," amongst which were a whole-plate camera and plates (surely as effective instruments in breaking the weather as mackintoshes are in producing fine days), we hurried up to the ridge. The wind was such that our bodies had to be held into it several degrees from the perpendicular to counteract its thrust, and when it suddenly lulled, the laws of gravitation seemed to have gone crazy.

A great calm reigned in Bhasteir Corrie, however, and we soon reached the cave. This is Bhasteir Nick Gully, already referred to, and is a most weird place. The walls are wet, overhanging and moss-covered; between them is wedged a chaos of immense boulders extending upward to a height of about 80 feet. Some of these project far out, and, when we got well inside the cave, the dripping water from the most forward of them would have fallen quite 20 feet outside of us, had the wind not caught and scattered it in all directions. The floor

of the cave sloped steeply upward, extending inwards under a natural arch caused by a jammed rock, until the walls became so narrow that a man could go no further.

We had heard that the place had been climbed, so in spite of our benumbed state we put on the rope and cast around for the way upward. An attempt to climb up the right wall, with a view to attaining the forward block, was a failure in keeping with the day and our surroundings. It was dismal. We then went further inside and scrambled to the top of the natural arch. The gully walls here were too wide for "backing up," but higher they narrowed and it seemed as though it would be possible to "back up" to a certain chock-stone which we saw about 20 feet above us. What was beyond we could not tell. Some small holds on the right wall carried one upward until the narrowing walls gave a rest for the back, when a hard struggle, for everything was streaming with moisture, brought me to the chock-stone. Its upper edge made a fine handhold.

When my head was thrust above it another huge cave was disclosed. Its floor was covered with screes and boulders, and would have provided accommodation for a dozen people. Straight outward were some huge wedged boulders; about 15 feet beyond these, and slightly higher, was the solitary forward block. At the junction of the inner boulders and the left wall (looking outwards) was a small hole, a sort of natural window.

After all were up, we traversed out to it and thrust our heads through. Below us was a mossy ledge which led still further out, but seemed to

cease about a yard before the forward block could be reached. The intervening wall was covered with moisture which the wind caught and dashed in our faces. A glance downward disclosed the bed of the gully 60 feet below, with nothing worth speaking of between us and it. We decided that the forward block was a snare and delusion, that we had no wish to attain it, and straightway dismissed it from our plans. So much for the outside route which, as far as I know, has not yet been climbed.

I had heard of a vertical, 40-foot funnel leading upward from the back of the cave, and we decided to ascend by it. It was not easy to find, and for some time we searched for it in vain.

A strong draught was evidence that it existed, but no glimmer of daylight came through to corroborate. Where was it? Perhaps it was dark in its lower reaches. Acting on this assumption, the strong man of the party offered his shoulder, to which the gymnast at once mounted, and, as his hands were occupied, thrust his head upward into the various dark places that might have been holes in the roof of the cave. Hard contact with something always more solid than a hole was quickly causing him to desist, when a loosely held stone fell from the roof. The strong man heard it coming and dodged to one side, with the result that the gymnast and the stone descended together. They involved the strong man in their fall, and my two companions and their trophy became a struggling mass on the floor of the cave; then came a crash as the cause of the trouble splintered itself on the boulders away down in the corrie, while my comrades gathered themselves together

and compared notes. Neither of them was any worse, so we continued our search.

Matches were useless, for the draught immediately extinguished them.

However, the difficulty was solved by following the current of air upward. This led us right to the innermost recess of the cave; by creeping along on hands and knees, and twisting my neck, I was able to discern the "funnel." Down it came an uncertain glimmer of daylight. Further inspection revealed, immediately above me, a small chamber, the floor of which was formed by some wedged boulders. In the floor was the small hole through which I was looking; this was the only entrance from below. Above the chamber was the "funnel," which corkscrewed vertically for about 30 feet to where I could see the mist and snowflakes swirling about in the wind, to the accompaniment of a dreary groan caused by the upward rush of air.

I retreated, and, to the astonishment of the others, took off my coat and vest. I had seen sufficient to know that only a reduction to my smallest dimensions would ensure success in passing through. The rope also was taken off, and then I knelt with hands thrust forward in supplicating attitude, as though I were a pilgrim and the hole some ancient and honoured deity for whose delectation I offered my person. But it was only after lying on my back and working through in this fashion that my upper half was accepted. And then came trouble. Something caught behind, and in spite of my struggles it seemed as though I should have to beat a retreat,

when a button suddenly came off, and I slipped through into the sanctum—a small, rock-bound chamber.

What the usual Coolin climbs offer in the way of height, exhilaration, and magnificent views, this gully more than equals in grotesque weirdness. It must surely be unique,[1] and is, as the guide-books say so frequently, "well worth a visit."

The way, truly a strait and narrow one, was unmistakable, and after receiving sundry garments and the rope from the others, I started upward. "Close contact with nature" is a fine thing; nowhere else that I know can it be so practically enjoyed as in this funnel between Am Basteir and the Tooth. The climbing was not difficult, however, and before long I reached the outer world, where the others soon joined me.

The snow by this time had given place to a fine drizzle, and the wind had abated somewhat, so we decided to try the descent by the South Face. After scrambling a few feet up the back of the Tooth, the small cairn which marks the top of this climb was reached. A few feet downward over the edge was a wide rock-ledge; to this we descended and lay on our chests, peering through the mist in an endeavour to locate the exact route. A crack ran vertically downward, growing wider as it receded, until it became lost in the mist. Boot-nail scratches were entirely missing; this seemed strange, for we knew that the climb had been done several times.

But here it is advisable to diverge from this description of our day's proceedings and describe

[1] At the time of writing the North Chimney had not been climbed.

this climb from the foot, as the route can thus be made clearer, and most climbers will prefer to take it in the upward direction first.

The climb starts from the ridge immediately below the overhanging knife-edge of rock on the west side of the Tooth.

This point can be reached either by way of a shallow scoop in the rock leading up to it from Bhasteir Corrie, or by following along the ridge from the level plateau near Sgurr a'Fionn Choire. Neither of these approaches offers any difficulty. Standing at the starting-point, and looking directly upward, the rocks of the Tooth overhang to such an extent as partially to obstruct the view skyward.

It is difficult to realise that this impending rock, which must weigh thousands of tons, is held in place only by its own cohesion and solidity. The remembrance of its name will be likely to prompt most weird thoughts to the imaginative. It looks a veritable "executioner."

A descent of a yard or two on the Lota Corrie side brings the climber to a horizontal terrace which extends 30 or 40 feet along the side of the Tooth. Its near extremity is almost directly under the summit, and in looking upward from here it is at once apparent how exceedingly difficult it would be to climb direct to the top from this side. From here, however, owing to the foreshortening of the rocks, it looks easier than it would prove. I remember looking at it with a novice some years ago, and he was sure it might be climbed, until I asked him to try. About 4 feet up he came to a standstill, and began to explain that if there were a few more handholds, and the rock were

not so steep, and so on, he thought he could get up. I agreed with him. It may be climbed some day, however.

The terrace leads to an easy rock corner, which is followed upwards to another terrace running about 20 feet still further along the side of the Tooth. It is wide, and possesses good anchorage. About half-way along is an angular, detached block, which would probably be in a better and safer position for the climber were it down in Lota Corrie.

Beyond this boulder the terrace dwindles to a ledge, and then ceases altogether on the sheer face of the cliff. The result of following the two terraces is to bring one to a great height above the corrie; the situation is most exposed, and the dip downward almost vertical. So also are the rocks above, but not quite to the same extent. Starting at a height of about 20 feet above the ledge, a chimney will be seen running upward to the skyline for some 60 feet or so. Above a point nearly at the end of our ledge a shallow corner not unlike that leading from the lower terrace, but smoother and steeper, provides the only way upward to the foot of the chimney.

And here a thought will probably strike other climbers as it did me—that this South Face of the Tooth was made to be climbed.

It has often been forced upon me that good climbs seem especially made to give sport to those who find their pleasure in them. A good handhold in such a position that the climb would be impossible without it; a foothold or a spike of rock, as a hitch for the rope, just where they

are really necessary to make things safe, and other circumstances over which man has no control, combine to make climbers exclaim, as I have often seen them do dozens of times, "Why, this was to be climbed!" Certainly, without the corner connecting the ledge with the chimney, this route up the Tooth ought to be impracticable. Incidentally, that corner gives the best piece of the whole course.

... is steep and smooth.[1] The holds ..., even when the rocks are streaming ... they are quite adequate, and soon ... kneeling position in a small sloping ... face is shoved up against the rock, ... certain groping about for a higher ... probably be indulged in before a ... hold is felt on the right wall. This ... contorting in the process of straightening ... a standing attitude can be attained. ... hold then does duty for the right foot; ... ing up on to it, the top of this stretch ... hold, and an "arm-pull" brings the ... splintered rocks at the foot of the ... The short stretch is not unlike the top ... on Great Gable, both as ... and the character of the climb-

... the chimney is easy but exposed, ... 15 feet from its top, where it has ... rock, a sloping ledge leads off to ... traverse along this and the final

[1] The white jersey, in the photograph opposite, is just ...

BHASTEIR TOOTH FROM LOTA CORRIE.

pull up over the edge are fine. This lands one on the old route up the Tooth, about 50 feet from the top.

The whole climb is strongly to be recommended. The actual difficulty, though never great, is always sufficient to engross the whole attention; the exposed nature of the various situations; the perfect anchorage and the inspiring views downward are altogether delightful. It is deservedly one of the most popular courses in the Coolin, and if any go away disappointed it will be because there is not more of it.

To return to our descent, one of my companions was lowered down the crack, and, after he had descended a few feet, came upon the scratches leading along the traverse. However, he kept steadily downward to anchorage, where we soon joined him, having come straight down the crack from the top. To a party descending, this is perhaps the best course. The open corner leading from the foot of the chimney to the ledge below was somewhat unpleasant in its then condition, and, as we looked downward for the footholds, the view between our legs of the swirling mist, with an occasional glimpse of the scree away below, seemed to enhance the difficulty.

Once below this we moved simultaneously along the terraces until the ridge under the Tooth was gained, where we took off the rope. By this time our garments were soaked through, so we descended the shallow scoop into Bhasteir Corrie, across which we tramped homeward, wading through the great red burn where it was struck, and treating its deep pools with a lordly unconcern.

North Chimney—Bhasteir Tooth.—Conservatism is a trait which perhaps rock-climbers possess in greater measure than any other devotees of sport.

They look at certain places, and not only conclude that they are quite inaccessible, but even pass within a few feet of them time after time without so much as lifting a finger to put their opinion to the test. How often this has happened! One has only to recall many of the best climbs in Wales and the English Lakeland for ample corroboration. One fine day somebody comes along with an unbiassed mind and makes an ascent of a place which has always been considered quite "outside the pale"; and then the old *habitués* are ready to turn round and kick themselves for having, through their stupid conservatism, missed the opportunity of a good first ascent.

The great black cleft in the North Face of Bhasteir Tooth is an excellent case in point; it forms the strongest example that I know of a place that looks manifestly inaccessible proving not only possible, but not even particularly difficult. Scores of climbers, myself among the number, had glanced up at it in passing. They noted the forbidding-looking cave with roof overhanging 30 feet or more, and wagged their heads wisely, exclaiming—"That, at all events, is impossible. One can't climb up places which overhang to that extent." And with this they rested content. Perhaps in the present case such action, or rather inaction, is not surprising, and probably no one was more amazed than Messrs.

Shadbolt and Maclaren when, in June 1906, they found themselves peering out through a small hole in the top of the Tooth, after having climbed the tortuous mazes of its interior. The spirit of taking nothing for granted brought them a rich reward; I know several men who would have gone to Skye specially for this one ascent could they have been the first to make it.

So far as I am personally concerned, when Mr. G. B. Gibbs told me at the inn that it had been climbed, I felt so sure there must be a misunderstanding that I went for a photograph for identification. It appeared there was no mistake, however, and I promptly decided to visit it next day.

We were a large party, too many to be groping about simultaneously in the same "through route," so those who had not been up the Bhasteir Nick Gully took it, while my party investigated the North Chimney. We arranged to meet again on the top of the Tooth. As we entered the shades of Bhasteir and noticed the drops of water falling from the top of our prospective climb, downward for 100 feet before they struck the rocks, it was evident that we were in for something even more unusual than the Bhasteir Nick Gully. And so it ultimately proved. The attractions of the latter climb are all greatly emphasised in this North Chimney; the pitch at the bottom is more difficult, the climb is longer, the interior passage is more bizarre and confined, the situations throughout are more startling, and the way is more involved.

Having roped up at the foot of Bhasteir Nick

Gully, we bade *au revoir* to our friends, and traversed along an upward sloping ledge to the right for about 40 feet. This brought us to a point immediately under the cave, but barring our entrance was a large wedge-shaped block. Its top was only about 12 feet above our heads, but it overhung to such an extent that we could devise no means of reaching it, except by standing on each other's shoulders. The rocks were streaming with water, which added greatly to the difficulties.

On a dry day this pitch can be climbed unaided by facing outward, when underneath the block, and working up with a foot on either wall until a handhold can be reached near the top of the stone. A bold swing round on this brings one into the open, and free from the impending mass of rock. Much energy is needed to effect the "arm-pull," and when gasping on the screes at the top of the pitch the climber will be quite justified in feeling that he has accomplished an uncommonly trying feat.

Even with the aid of a shoulder the place is not easy. Above it we found ourselves inside a huge cave. The floor was covered with scree which led us gently upward for some distance into the heart of the Tooth. Here a fine chimney, plentifully supplied with firm chock-stones, afforded pleasant "back and knee" work for 40 feet or so until it gave out in a small recess immediately under the roof of the cave. Away outwards the perpendicular walls, barely a yard apart, stretched unbroken on either hand for several feet. Directly above us the roof of the cave,

formed of huge blocks of trap rock wedged firmly between the walls, barred further progress.

It was quite dark inside. A match was struck, but its light disclosed no hole through which even a rat could pass. We began to fear that a recent fall of rock must have occurred and filled up the "through route" for ever, when a succession of wedged blocks at no great height above our heads was discerned. When we got to the top of the innermost of these we found that a horizontal passage, enclosed on both sides by the solid rock, and above and below by wedged blocks, led outwards a short distance. A hundred feet straight below us and seen between the interstices in the rocky floor of the passage was the scree of the lower cave. Above our heads a faint glimmer of daylight disclosed a small hole, but, alas! it was no bigger than a football. We all stuck our heads into it in turn, but it was utterly useless as a means of exit. After consultation we crept outward along the passage until it became too narrow to go further. No other upward way was to be found, and we were about to abandon the climb in disgust, when, on our return journey, we saw immediately above us another passage leading back above that along which we had come.

Our third man was then brought up to us. He, poor man, was in charge of the rücksack, which, Sisyphus-like, he pushed along in front of him. Every now and then he called down anathemas on the heads of those who require rücksacks in such places, but these were speedily stifled by the article in question rolling back

down the passage into his face. As soon as his grievances were at an end we one by one squeezed through a small hole, which brought us into a long, scree-floored rocky chamber. It was illuminated by means of a hole in its floor at the far end, through which we caught a glimpse of the outer world. After passing along to the hole we each in turn lay on our back, working through it in this fashion, and ere long sprawled out on to the sloping roof of the Tooth. As our third man emerged, his appearance reminded us very strongly of the pictures of the climber in "Sanger Davies" rounding a chock-stone head downwards, only in this case the back was supported by the scree floor.

On our level, and but a few feet away, was the small cairn marking the top of the route up the Lota Corrie face. Our friends had arrived before us, so we joined forces, and scrambled to the top of the Tooth together to compare notes.

The Bhasteir Gorge.—The tremendous chasm which drains Bhasteir Corrie, separating Sgurr nan Gillean from Sgurr a'Bhasteir, was climbed in 1890 by Messrs. G. Hastings, W. C. Slingsby, and E. Hopkinson. They supplied Mr. C. T. Dent with some notes on it for a paper he was then writing for the *Alpine Journal*.[1] As this is long since out of print, and because their climb was in many ways unique and amusing, it is appended in full. Other climbers had attempted its ascent and had failed.

"The actual obstruction was a matter of un-

[1] Vol. xv. p. 433.

certainty. Very soon, however, when the party were well in the gorge, the nature of the difficulty was disclosed, and turned out to be a pool of water some 30 to 40 feet in length and 12 in width, averaging probably about 10 feet in depth. A tarn of this nature forms a very pretty feature in a mountain picture, but a somewhat unexpected obstacle to the mountaineer; howbeit, as the party seem to have been going a sort of steeplechase, a water-jump was not much out of place. It is deeply to be regretted that the ubiquitous photographer was not present on the occasion. My information is limited really to the notes supplied, and I can but give the bare facts of the climb; a photographer might have been able to record some of the bare facts much more graphically. On each side of the little tarn the rocks were perpendicular, a term that, in mountaineering literature, signifies anything from difficult to impossible; at any rate, they were sheer enough to be pronounced impracticable. At the head of the pool a little waterfall some 20 feet high completed the picture. A huge rock, which at some time or another had fallen from the side of the mountain, had become wedged in the steep bed of the little stream, and other loose stones were piled on the top of it. The big boulder projected about 10 feet over the pool. It was necessary, therefore, in the first place, to get to the head of the pool and, in the second, to turn the boulder. A bold attempt by Hastings to find a way by the little ledge, while still observing the ordinary mountaineering proprieties

in the matter of costume, proved fruitless. After some ingenious climbing he was pounded and it seemed possible for a minute or two, to the great delectation of his companions, that, in the words of the Portuguese dialogue book, 'he could not nor to go further neither to put back.' The alternative route back lay through the pool, and those who were in a position of safety watched with interest to see what way might be selected. By means of some ingenious movements, described by the spectators, rather contemptuously, as a wriggle, he succeeded in rejoining his companions without taking an involuntary bath. Meanwhile the others had adopted a costume more suitable for the emergency, and stood, like yellow primroses, on the brim.

"Then the leader plunged boldly in and swam to the head of the pool. So far the route was simple enough, but a more painful exercise consisted in climbing the rock to the top of the waterfall. The performance is described as being more instructive from an anatomical point of view than graceful. The rope was now thrown up, and Slingsby and Hopkinson, as true gymnasts, followed. Even now the difficulties were not at an end, for a few feet further up another tarn was found, which, however, it was possible to ford, though the party was waist-deep in the water. From the upper pool to the end of the gorge the obstacles were less, and the party soon emerged into the head of Coire Bhasteir. It is difficult in these days to discover any novelty, and unwise to claim originality in anything whatever, but I can recall no other recorded occa-

sion on which any party ascended a mountain by water—since the days of Noah."

The above account leaves one quite in the dark as to what became of their clothes. The garb of present-day mountaineers is often so peculiar that anything they might wear would occasion but little surprise. I thought, however, that the upper air of Bhasteir Corrie would probably prove a little cheerless to "yellow primroses," so I wrote to Mr. Slingsby, who kindly enlightened me. He says that "Hastings plunged in and swam across the pool and climbed the waterfall on to an overhanging rock. Meanwhile we had jammed all the clothes into a rücksack. 'Throw the line,' shouted Hastings. Again and yet again we tried, jeered at by our skipper shivering above the waterfall. After repeated throws a coil at last reached him. The rücksack was then fastened to the middle of the rope and, perhaps unexpectedly, it reached its haven in safety, and quite dry. Then we swam over, climbed the waterfall, and carried our clothes through the gorge."

Mr. Harold Raeburn has since shown that the waterfall pitch can be turned by climbing up the right wall.

To the best of my knowledge the direct ascent has not yet been repeated.

CHAPTER VI

BIDEIN DRUIM NAN RAMH

THE long elevated ridge which separates Harta Corrie from Coir-'uisg and its world-famous loch is called Druim nan Ramh (the ridge of oars). It has its start near the seaward end of Loch Coruisk, at the point where the stream runs in from the small Loch a'Choire Riabhaich.

The rampart rises steeply, and soon assumes the proportions of a ridge, being bounded by Corrie Riabhach on the one hand and Coruisk on the other. It stretches away, ever gradually rising, until it becomes the high mountain wall dividing the two greatest corries in the Coolin. After a few hundred yards it steepens more rapidly and grows narrower until, after being crossed by a vein of softer material which has weathered out and left a deep gash in its crest, it rises to a pinnacle which is just under the culminating point of the ridge, the Central Peak of Bidein Druim nan Ramh. This is on the main ridge of the Coolin. To the immediate north and south-west of it are two other well-defined, sharp mountain summits which have no distinctive names beyond those afforded by their compass-bearings from the Central Peak.

The three peaks of Bidein Druim nan Ramh are shown on the Ordnance Survey in a straight

line, but it should be borne in mind that in reality they form a triangle, one peak being due north and the other several degrees west of south of the Central, the highest, summit.

On the west, Bidein Druim nan Ramh plunges steeply down into Corrie Mhadaidh. The spur running from the south-west peak into Corrie na Creiche, and ending at Sgurr an Fheadain, divides Corrie Mhadaidh from Corrie Tairneilear.

Corrie Tairneilear is the name of the fine mountain recess immediately under Sgurr a'Mhadaidh; so that Corrie Mhadaidh is separated from its peak by this corrie and the ridge of Sgurr an Fheadain. This is somewhat curious, and would suggest that a mistake has been made somewhere in the past. However, the present arrangement of the names follows local usage—the ultimate Court of Appeal—and although this may have originated (I don't for a moment suggest that it did) in the brain of some merry clansman on the way home after a spree, when his ideas were a bit muddled, it is too late now to suggest making alterations.

Messrs. L. Pilkington, E. Hulton, and H. Walker reached the top of the highest peak in the autumn of 1883 and, unless some prehistoric Macleod or Macdonald had forestalled them, this was the first ascent.

They went from Sligachan by way of Harta Corrie on to Druim nan Ramh, the crest of which they followed to where it abuts on the steep rocks of the Central Peak. Here they "traversed a ledge on the Coruisk side of the mountain until it lost itself in the face of the cliff."

Thence, "after a long reach," they struck straight up to the top, where they signalised the beginning of a fresh era in its existence by crowning it with a cairn.

They returned by the way they had come, thus leaving the ascent from the north to Messrs. C. Pilkington, H. Walker, and Heelis in May 1887. After climbing the North Peak, the latter party descended to the col between it and the highest point, but not fancying the way directly upward, they contoured on the Corrie Mhadaidh side into a gully which led them to the col between the Central and South-west Peaks. Passing under the arch formed by the huge boulder in the col, they turned to the left, and an "interesting scramble" took them to the top.[1] Mr. Pilkington then found, in endeavouring to take his bearings by compass, that his readings were useless, owing to the rocks being magnetic—a discovery the remembrance of which must be of the first importance to climbers, for other parts of the ridge share the same peculiarity.

In spite of its pretentious name Bidein Druim nan Ramh is by no means one of the highest of the Coolin, and fails to reach even the 3000-foot line. It is the sporting qualities of a mountain that count, however, and what it lacks in size it more than atones for in inaccessibility.

With the exception of Sgurr Dearg its summit is the most difficult of all the Coolin to reach. It is conceivable that, as these mountains become better known, some of the peaks may be littered with all the evidences of the tripper, but only

[1] *Alpine Journal*, vol. xiii. p. 441.

rock-climbers, most of whom know that the proper place for sardine tins and sandwich papers is under a remote stone, will attain to the small, moss-covered sanctuary which is the highest point of Bidein. It is such peaks that render the Coolin unique, for, apart from them, I think I am right in saying, all our home mountains have at least one side which can be ascended without resorting to actual climbing. And there is a great fascination about a mountain when the easiest way up it needs great care. In a lesser degree it makes a similar call upon the imagination and appeals to one's ambition in the same way as do some of the giants of Switzerland.

The traverse of its three peaks suffices to fill in a very good day's work from Sligachan, if taken by way of the Druim nan Ramh. It is often climbed from the Corrie na Creiche side, and if it be one's aim to "bag" peaks, this ambition can thus be more easily satisfied, for Mhadaidh, as well as the Castles, Bruach na Frithe, and, perhaps, Am Basteir and Sgurr nan Gillean can be crowded into a long day's programme.

Bidein Druim nan Ramh, by the Druim nan Ramh.—This delightful mountain scramble will always be associated in my mind with two very prosaic things—a tingling head and a more or less mutilated ear; which came about in this way. Many years ago, in the days when the Sharps were at Sligachan, four of us had been climbing amongst the Coolin for about three weeks. In strange contrast to the weather most commonly in vogue in Skye, the days were hot and the rocks reflected the heat to such an extent

that we felt we must shed all possible covering, even to our hair, which was really in urgent need of a crop. It seemed a pity to waste a day by going to Portree to have it cut, so one morning we interviewed Mrs. Sharp in order to see if she had any local talent equal to the occasion.

"Why, yes," said she; "Donald will be just the bit man ye're wanting. He trims up the horses, and I'm sure he could manage for you."

Accordingly we went to see Donald. We discovered him asleep in the stable. He was soon alive to our requirements, however, and in a very short time had a piece of sacking around my neck, and was selecting a pair of shears.

He felt their edge with his thumb-nail, at the same time emitting the hissing noise peculiar to those who have to do with horses. And then he started. Keeping up an incessant hiss, and snipping with his shears, he soon had a tuft of hair cut off. And then came a most resounding smack on the side of my head as he removed it. "Hold hard, Donald!" I exclaimed; "I'm not a horse!" "Varra sorry, sir," said he; "I was forgetting!" And he kept on forgetting.

The incessant hissing and snipping were punctuated at frequent intervals by such smacks as came very near to removing me bodily from my seat; my friends doubled up with laughter and an unfortunate remonstrance with Donald brought him so suddenly from his flight of artistic enthusiasm that before he knew what had happened, he had very neatly snipped off the top of my right ear. My hair was only half cut, but Donald

was discharged in disgrace, and we set off for Bidein without further preliminary.

The walk up Glen Sligachan to Harta Corrie is very rough and long, but is rendered delightful by the magnificent scenery.

The contrast between the splintered outlines and jagged details of Sgurr nan Gillean and the rounded contours of the Red Hills is very striking. The latter may have little with which to appeal to the climber, but as a foil to their rugged neighbours they are most fortunate. The scent of the moor, the bog-myrtle and simple flora of the Highlands, with the cattle browsing by Sligachan burn, and an occasional inquisitive deer, are all so truly Scotch and so far removed from the present day that one almost expects to see some old-time Macleod or Macdonald start up from behind a stone and walk off with a scowl at the intruding Sassenach.

We left the path when about on a level with Sgurr na h'Uamha, crossed the angle of the stream coming out of Harta Corrie, and shortly after arrived at the Bloody Stone—the scene of one of the many encounters between the Macleods and Macdonalds.

It would probably be pretty safe to point to any particular spot on the lower slopes of the Coolin and say that there took place one of the savage hand-to-hand fights of these clans, with either wine (in the form of whisky) or cattle as the excuse for a fight. It seems a pity that rock-climbing was not in vogue then; it would surely have proved a safer outlet for their surplus energy. They would probably have robbed us

of our first ascents, however, so perhaps after all things were best ordered as they were.

The rock-climber will probably view the Bloody Stone more in the light of a problem than as an object of historic interest. It certainly gives a nice scramble on its south side which is a type in miniature of what gabbro-climbing is. A second and quite difficult route can be made up its eastern side; the start is a fine object-lesson in how far to trust gabbro as a foothold. It is wonderful stuff for gripping boot-nails. After making the ascent, we struck across Harta Corrie, meanwhile admiring the fine pyramidal shape of Sgurr na h'Uamha as seen from hereabouts, and thence, after a steep grind, reached the crest of Druim nan Ramh.

If for no other reason than because of the view, this approach to Bidein is to be recommended. Loch Coruisk is almost at one's feet, 1500 feet below, and looks more enclosed and deeply set amongst the hills than from the usual point of view at its foot. All the peaks on the main ridge of the Coolin are stretched out in a rough semicircle, from Gars-bheinn in the south to the sharp peak of Sgurr na h'Uamha in the north. Across Harta Corrie, in itself, with its upper storey Lota (or Loft) Corrie, a very wild scene, the ridge of Clach Glas and the fine mass of Blaven show up wonderfully, and look, in the absence of any comparative object, twice their actual height.

"Here in the bright summer days,
Stretched on the sward I would be,
And gaze to the West on Blaven's crest,
Towering above the sea;

And I'd watch the billowing mist
Roll down his mighty side,
While up from the shore would come evermore
The music of the tide."

A most profitable half-hour can be spent in locating the different peaks by the aid of a map, and those who know their Coolin by heart will surely find some mountain on the mainland, in the dim distance beyond Scavaig, that needs identification.

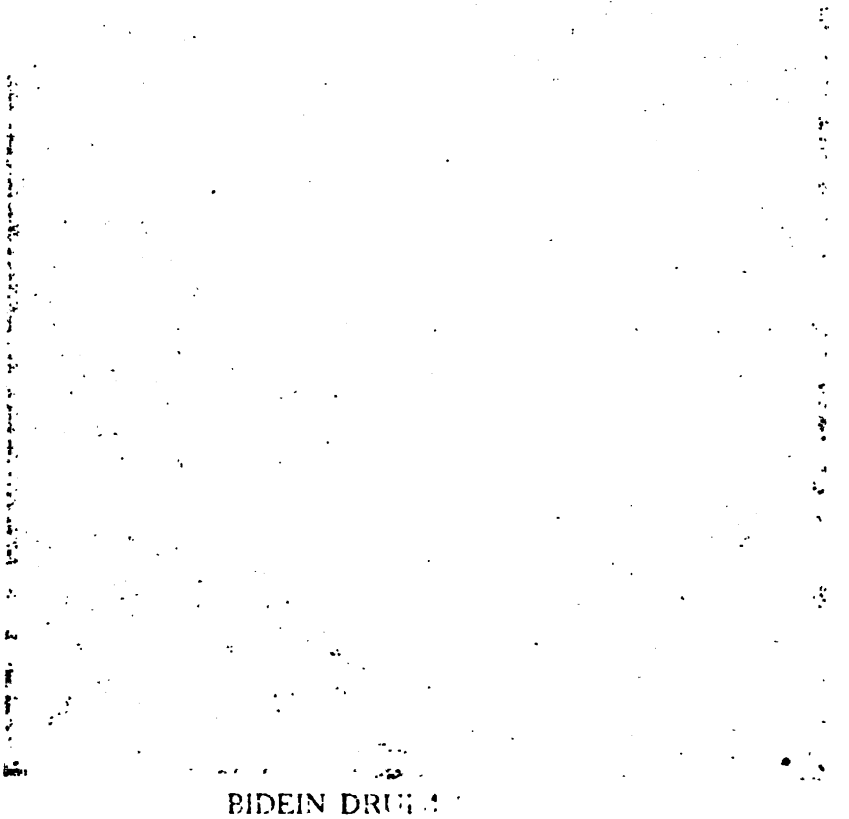
In short, one can waste a vast amount of time on such a spot; arguments range from the identity of various peaks to whether a pipe, a comfortable stretch of heather, and such a wonderful prospect, are not in themselves sufficient for the sum of human happiness without the necessity of being ever on the move upward. But fine days in Skye must not be squandered on philosophy, and argument cannot altogether dull one's conscience.

The ridge rose fairly steeply, but could be ascended without using the hands until the slope eased somewhat, and the three peaks of Bidein, with the rock-tower in front of the Central Peak, came into sight quite close at hand in front. For a short distance the going was almost level, until we found ourselves pulled up short by the cleft in the ridge. A descent was then made on the Coruisk side for a few feet, until an outwardly sloping ledge led downward into the gap. This ledge partook in nature of the softer vein of material that has caused the rift, the holds on it being unreliable. A steep drop of about 15 feet from the ledge brought us to the lowest point. A

scree-terrace now ran to the left, and led upward again to the crest, but as this gap is the only piece of real climbing on the ridge, we made the most of it by striking straight up from it by way of the opposite wall. This is of firm gabbro, very steep, and gave about 25 feet of real enjoyment.

The pinnacle was now quite close at hand. It is marked on the 1″ Ordnance Survey "Small Pinnacle—not a peak of Bidein"—a clumsy name for it when the "Druim Pinnacle" suggests itself so readily. Its ascent is quite easy, but the conscientious climber wishing to follow the ridge strictly will find it impossible here. He may go straight over the Pinnacle to the ridge beyond by hitching his rope and descending on it, but the rocks overhang, and he will inevitably leave the rock and swing in the air at one point.

Beyond this pinnacle the precipitous rocks of the Central Peak barred direct ascent, so we followed a ledge along its Coruisk face. After proceeding a few feet we noticed some peculiar markings in the surface of the rock, which was very loose here. At one place it was all regularly laid out in concentric circles, like those generated on the surface of water by the disturbance caused by a falling stone. It was as though something had fallen into the rock when in a molten state, leaving ripples which had immediately petrified. We scaled away the outside layers, and soon came upon a hard round metallic nucleus. It was evidently a small meteorite, a most interesting find which, in spite of its weight, I put into a rücksack (some one else's, of course!), and it now



BIDEIN DRU
FROM THE DR

serves a less romantic but more useful purpose than formerly as a door-stop.

Our ledge led us into the gully dividing the Central from the South-west Peak. We crossed it, and after scrambling up its left-hand wall, traversed the flank of the South-west Peak to the rounded main ridge beyond.

This is Bealach na Glaic Moire, the highway between Coruisk and Corrie na Creiche. It can be crossed in either direction from Sligachan by an ordinarily active tourist, and is probably the very finest pedestrian expedition in the Coolin.

The ascent of the South-west Peak from here gave a pretty scramble, but was not difficult. The broad slab on its north side contains an unsteady-looking rock-pinnacle, under which we crept, and soon gained the col beyond. The Central Peak now towered above. Its cliffs are well broken up, and a variety of routes can be taken to the summit, but none of them are perfectly easy. After admiring the view down to Coruisk, framed in a dark setting of rock on either hand, we struck straight upward, and ten minutes later were lying on the moss-carpeted summit. It is in extent about twice the size of an ordinary couch, and is beautifully upholstered; the change from the hard rough rock to this luxurious soft lounge was altogether delightful.

By this time it was about 7.30 P.M. Dinner was due at Sligachan, but in spite of this, and the fact that two of us had forgotten our lunch, we sat up there in the still air, reluctant to leave.

The atmosphere was quite clear, but a grey pall of unbroken cloud covered the sky, except

in the north-west, where, out of a thin streak of vivid green, the sun shot bright rays of light on the far horizon. Slowly it sank nearer the belt of clear sky, shedding its rays over a wider surface and sending long streamers of radiance towards us. Soon the whole visible ocean was a mass of molten silver, in which were suspended the distant islands of the Outer Hebrides. And then the sun reached the zone of clear sky, and flashed level into our faces, bathing the whole scene westward in dazzling light. Corrie Mhadaidh was dotted all over with points of strong light, and thrown towards us from each was a long, shimmering shadow — a Rembrandtesque landscape, with the stream running down its centre in a twisting line of brilliance. We remembered Sheriff Nicolson's verse—

"Where the sun sinks beyond Hunish Head
Swimming in glory,
As he goes down to his ocean bed
Studded with islands,
Flushing the Coolin with royal red,"
. . . . . .

But behind us, in Coruisk and Harta Corrie, it was almost twilight, purple and mysterious. Across the corrie, on the broad flank of Sgurr na h'Uamha, the shadow of our peak was cast in faithful likeness. As the sun sank lower, we watched the shadow ascend, until it passed upward beyond the ridge into the air, where we lost sight of it. By now the lower rim of the sun was almost resting on the horizon, and, much as we wished to watch the pageant to its setting, we had perforce to turn to the descent.

As it was already so late, we struck down on the Corrie Mhadaidh side, intending to traverse around into the col between the Central and North Peaks. We attempted to traverse too early, however, and soon found ourselves on the outwardly sloping ledges overhanging the corrie.

For about twenty minutes we persevered, until it became apparent that we must return.

I was then about 10 feet below my companions, and so engrossed in looking for a way out of our difficulties that, when one of them asked me if a certain big rock above was quite firm, I absent-mindedly, and quite without thinking, returned, "Yes!" The next moment a startled shout from above and a harsh, grating noise caused me to collect my scattered thoughts. One of my friends was just jumping off the rock as I turned, and the next moment it came bounding down towards me. I was almost powerless to get out of its way, but, thanks to good fortune (perhaps I ought to say Providence), it dropped a clear 6 inches to the left of my body. It was also most fortunate that it fell clear of the rope, for had it caught it, the weight would certainly have dislodged us all.

The buzz as it went past, and the roar it made as it crashed down the precipice below, brought home most forcibly the narrow margin of our escape.

I have read many articles on the Coolin climbs, and a great majority of them contain warnings about loose stones. It is to be hoped that this adventure of ours may be allowed to serve as a peg upon which to hang a reiteration of these

warnings. When all other dangers are lacking, then look out for loose stones! They are omnipresent in the Coolin, and choose the most unexpected opportunity for their antics. The man who "leaves no stone unturned" in his efforts to reach the top should be left at home.

We then climbed back to the summit.

Running due north was a veritable knife-edge of rock; along this we scrambled, with our fingers in Corrie Mhadaidh and the rest of us in Harta Corrie. The ridge ceased at a steep drop of about 15 feet.

Slightly on the Harta Corrie side was a narrow ledge, down which we climbed to the bottom of the steep part. Thence easy going along the skyline brought us to a cairn of three stones, beyond which the rocks were perpendicular. Again a traverse had to be made to the right, and then the route was straight downward, over two huge rock-steps, to the col between the Central and North Peaks. The ascent of the latter was quite easy, and we raced over its summit and down the slabs of its north side to the level ground beyond. By this time the sun had disappeared over the distant horizon, and in spite of the sky having almost cleared, darkness was rapidly coming on. Sligachan was a good three hours away, and so was, therefore, the prospect of food. We all agreed that had we possessed sufficient for another day, instead of none at all, the ridge would have served us for a bed. The night was warm, and to have passed it out on the mountain would have been delightful.

We never felt so reluctant to return to civilisa-

tion; but, as the late Leslie Stephen says, "a disordered stomach will spoil the finest scenery in the world," so we struck down a narrow scree-gully leading into Harta Corrie. The stones were at their highest angle of rest, and carried us bodily downward, without movement on our part, for several feet, until they got rather "out of hand" and we were forced to take to the gully wall until they settled down.

Another hour brought us through the corrie to the Bloody Stone, and thence across the river to the Glen Sligachan path. This is rough and stony enough by daylight. That dark night hid much floundering in bogs and stumbling over stones; it is to be feared that we found many answering to a similar name to that of the famous stone at the entrance to Harta Corrie. The last hour of the way was lighted by the moon, however, which hung in a clear sky over the black silhouette of Sgurr nan Gillean, and just enabled us to reach Sligachan on the stroke of midnight.

CHAPTER VII

SGURR AN FHEADAIN AND ITS CHIEF CHANTER

The Waterpipe Gully.—The narrow ridge running from the most southerly peak of Bidein Druim nan Ramh into Corrie na Creiche terminates in a well-defined peak. To this the name Sgurr an Fheadain—the peak of the chanters or pipes—has been given. Running up its western declivity, which faces Corrie na Creiche, and forming such a prominent, deeply marked cleft that it cannot well be overlooked, is the Waterpipe Gully.

Its name is probably the outcome of a very natural misunderstanding; instead of vesting the translation of the Gaelic name of the peak with a musical significance, it has been wrongly taken as meaning an ordinary common or mountain waterpipe. The gully merits either name equally, however, as any one who ascends it on a windy and wet day can testify. The water then chooses it as the most convenient channel down which to find its own level, and the wind whirls up it with a booming sound not unlike that of a deep organ-pipe—a veritable chanter—and no doubt, along with others on a smaller scale, the cause of the name Peak of the Chanters.

The gully was first climbed on September 9, 1895, and the credit of an unusually fine

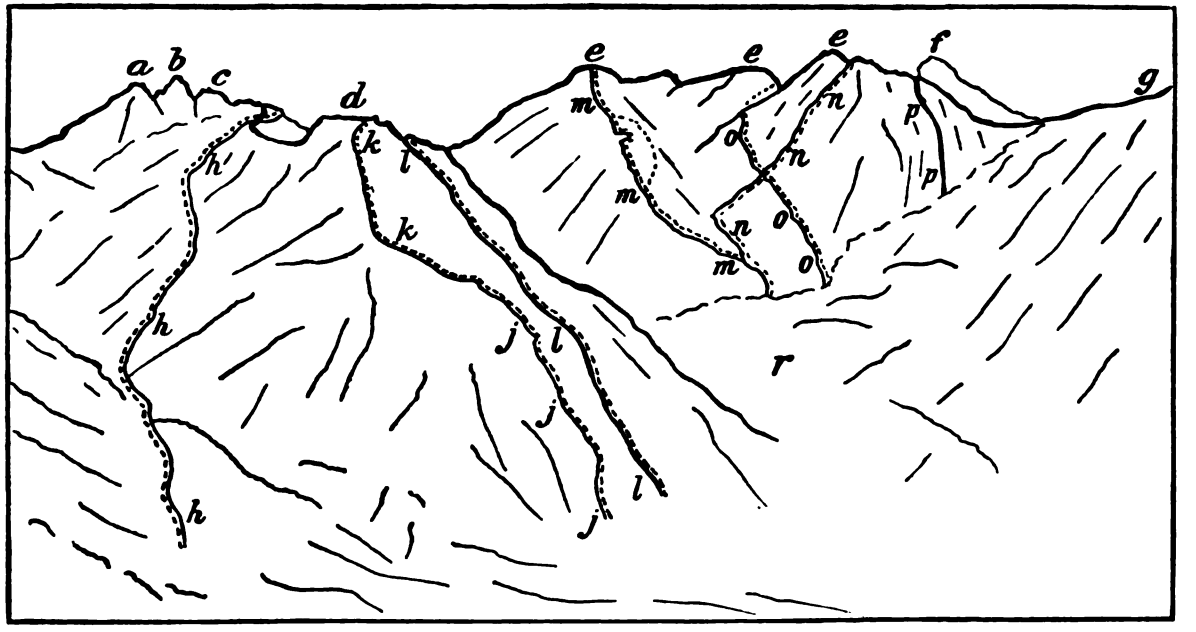
performance belongs to Messrs. J. Kelsall and A. W. Hallitt. A modest note appeared in the Climbers' Book at Sligachan, in which they described the gully as affording "constant, interesting, and sometimes difficult climbing."

They might, in my opinion, have gone much further than that, and said that it has probably no equal in the British Isles.

Certainly no gully with which I am acquainted, or of which I have heard, concentrates so much of sustained interest, grand rock scenery, and justifiable difficulty as does this.[1] Its length is well over 1100 feet; it contains more than twenty-five pitches—some of them monsters; the way is by no means easy to find, so that mountaineering as well as athleticism is needed in its ascent, and the difficulties are sufficiently severe and continuous to occupy one's incessant attention, while, at the same time, they are always well within the line which divides the justifiable from the unjustifiable: surely a long list of merits!

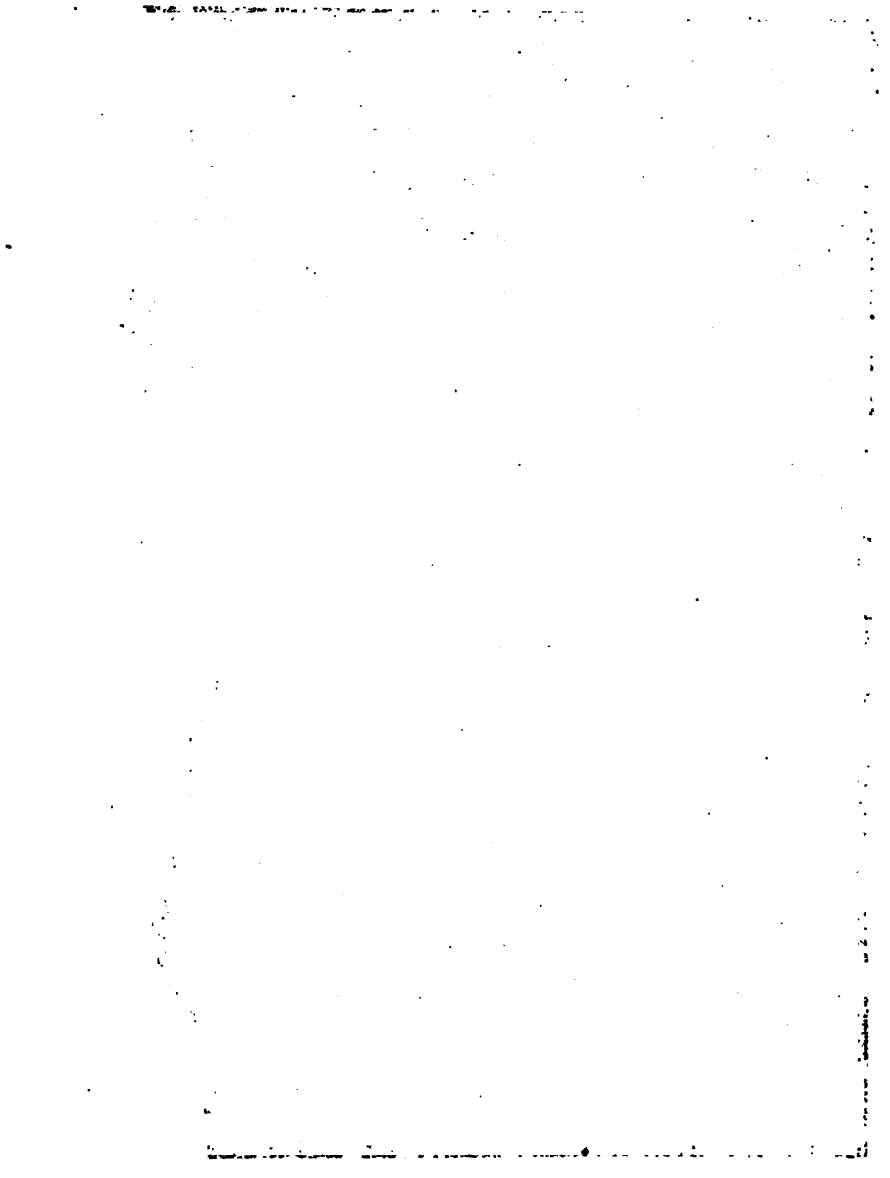
These might appear to be marred in the eyes of some by remembrance of the water which is so much in evidence, but this "fly in the ointment" is quite an inconsiderable one. In dry weather it is not there at all. In any case, those who climb this gully will probably agree that they are amply compensated for their wetting by the delight of the climbing and by the glow which comes to those who have done a thing which needed some doing; a glow which,

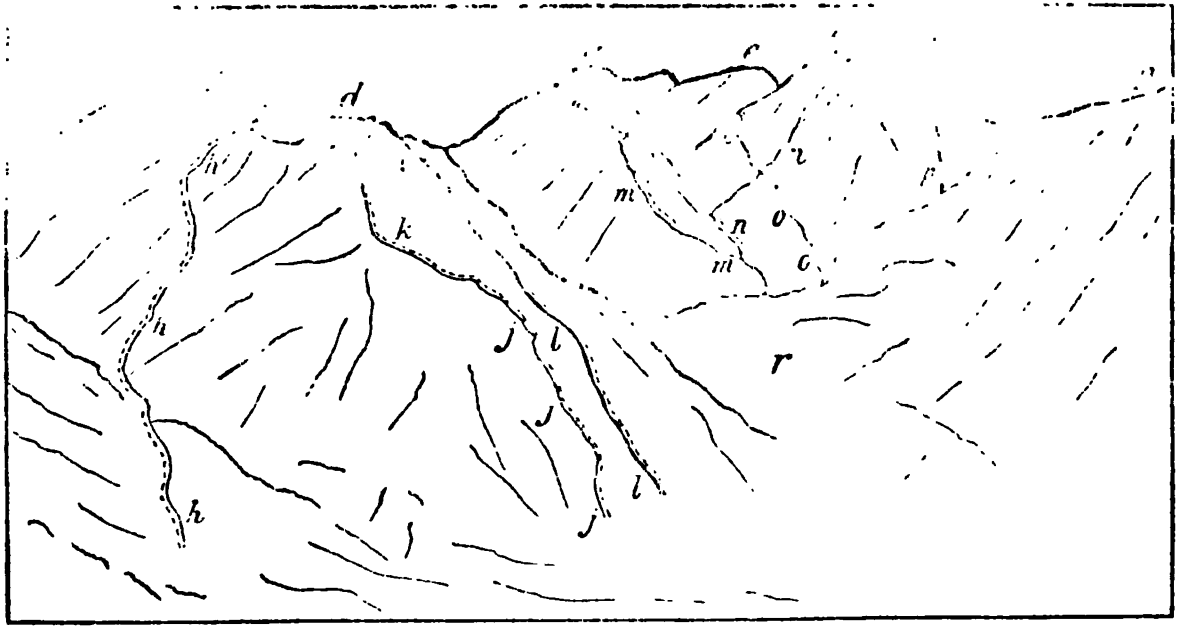
[1] An exception might be made in the case of the Slanting Gully of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.



a North Peak of Bidein Druim nan Ramh.
b Central Peak of Bidein Druim nan Ramh.
c South-west Peak of Bidein Druim nan Ramh.
d Sgurr an Fheadain.
e Peaks of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.
f Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh.
g Ridge to Sgurr Thuilm.
h Route through Coir' a'Mhadaidh to Bealach na Glaic Moire.
j Climb up Spur of Sgurr an Fheadain.
k The Summit Gully.
l The Waterpipe Gully.
m North-west Buttress climb, Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.
n The Foxes' Rake, Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.
o The Slanting Gully, Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.
p The Deep Gash Gully, Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.
r Corrie Tairneilear.

THE CLIMBS ON SGURR AN FHEADAIN AND SGURR A'MHADAIDH





a North Peak of Bidein Druim nan Ramh.
b Central Peak of Bidein Druim nan Ramh.
c South-west Peak of Bidein Druim nan Ramh.
d Sgurr an Fheadain.
e Pecks of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.
f Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.
g The Stone Shoot.
h Route from the Coire a'Mhadaidh to Beinn a'Chlachair Mor.
i Climbing up to Sgurr an Fheadain.
k The Summit Cliffs.
l The Waterpipe Gully.
m North-west Face of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.
n The Pinnacle Ridge of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.
p The Deep Gully, Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.
q Coire Lochain.
r Coire Dubh.

THE CLIMBS ON SGURR AN FHEADAIN AND SGURR A'MHADAIDH

CORRIE NA CREICHE.

by the way, when they have finished and are shivering, wet, and cold in a driving mist on the summit ridge, will be more mental than physical.

In such a long gully it is not surprising that some of the pitches should have been skirted in the earlier ascents. Further exploration and an increase in the number of competent parties have led to the direct ascent of all the pitches, a feat which was first accomplished by a large party, organised by the brothers Slade and led by Mr. R. E. Thompson, which climbed the second or "80-foot pitch" straight up instead of avoiding it on the right as had hitherto been the custom. This was in June 1899, and a "rare hunt" it gave them.

They started their climb shortly after 1 P.M., and it was not until twelve hours later that they emerged from the top of the gully, at 1 A.M.! It was almost five o'clock when they reached Sligachan, after having been on the move for eighteen and a half hours.

Granted that their party was large — but against this must be set the fact that it was also strong — where in our island is another gully to be found that can afford such sport as this? They were naturally not a little proud of their exploit, and a letter from one of them left no doubt in my mind that, whatever else I might miss on my next visit to Skye, I would certainly pay a call here. My opportunity came some little time later, and my companions were Messrs. A. H. Binns and H. Harland.

For three days the Skye weather had been living up to its worst traditions; the rain came

driving in sheets down Glen Sligachan, licking around the little inn as though it owed a personal grudge, and then went whistling along undiminished towards Portree. The sight and effect of it had become so wearisome that we resolved to go for a climb on the morrow whatever the weather might be; and as the Waterpipe Gully was normally wet, we decided to go there. The morning turned out fair, and our spirits rose as we strolled leisurely up towards Bealach a'Mhaim, noting a change in the wind and its promise of better things. From the Bealach we crossed the stream, whence half an hour's easy walking brought us to the foot of the climb. Here we put on the rope.

After scrambling over some fallen boulders, we walked about 30 feet along almost level scree straight into the mountain, the clean-cut, perpendicular walls of the gully forming huge portals on either hand. This is known amongst the shepherds as the Cave of the Archers (Uamh nan Saighead); it played a part in the tragedy of Corrie na Creiche (the Corrie of the Spoil).

The scree at its upper end abutted on a steep rocky rise in the gully-bed, crowned by a chock-stone. This was the first pitch. Water poured over it in a solid jet, and we found its ascent straight up over the stone none too easy. Confronting us, shortly after we emerged over its crest, was the great "80-foot pitch," of which we had heard so much. It is in two sections, the lower consisting of a narrow chimney, crowned with a chock-stone, and the higher formed by a

dyke of rock, composed of basalt and diabase, which has weathered out and left a vertical chimney about 40 feet in height. Between the two sections is a small scree platform.

A reference to the photo facing p. 116 shows the construction of the place better than I can describe it. This was taken some days later, when the water had diminished to a mere trickle. Now, however, it came down in a perfect cascade, and the pitch did not look feasible. I was in favour of following the old route up the right wall past a small ash-tree, contouring into the gully again above the pitch; but Harland, who fairly revels in places that ordinary mortals would shun, claimed his prerogative as leader to have a shot at the pitch direct.

Thinking that the water would soon reveal things to him in their right proportion, we agreed to follow. He accordingly backed up the first chimney over the cap-stone to the small scree platform, where we soon joined him. That 30 feet of climbing was quite difficult, however, and gave us a foretaste of what was to come. "At the moment when you begin to wonder if your wind will last the struggle, the left hand grasps a welcome ledge where you can fix yourself with comparative safety, and give a sigh of relief(?) as you look up and realise that the best part is yet to come"—so writes Mr. R. E. Thompson of their first ascent.

I fear the sight of that "best part" did not cause much enthusiasm amongst us. It looked frightfully steep and holdless, and was adorned with the wettest waterfall under which Harland

had ever shivered. So he said as he sat wedged across the chimney about 10 feet above us, patiently waiting for me to climb up and give him a shoulder. Up to our present position I had managed to keep fairly dry, and so hesitated to join him in his dampness, until he raised his body a little, thus allowing much accumulated water to escape on to our heads. This did away with all scruples. About 20 feet up the chimney, on the left wall, was a rock ledge about a span of the fingers in width; from my shoulder he was able to attain this, and, wedged across the chimney, to take in my rope until we were both seated side by side on the ledge, with our feet on the opposite wall.[1]

The part immediately above this ledge was very slimy and destitute of hold, and Harland again used my shoulder to effect a higher lodgment. He was then entirely dependent on his own efforts for the rest of the pitch. With feet on the right wall and back on the other he worked his way slowly upward, of necessity testing every hold, as some of them seemed loose, until, after a somewhat anxious *quart d'heure* for us, a heavy rush of water announced the fact that he was out of its channel and safely at the top of the pitch. "And the ranks of Tusculum," as represented by two damp climbers, "could scarce forbear to cheer." It was a very cool piece of climbing, and much impressed us when our turn came. After backing up to just underneath a small chock-stone near the top, a hold for the left hand became a necessity. This seemed

[1] The lower figure in the illustration facing p. 116 is just below this ledge.

entirely lacking on the stone itself, but by groping about inside, an angular and most comforting niche was found which rendered the passage safe, but it will always be wonderfully sensational. It is one of the steepest pitches I have seen, and its full 80 feet of emptiness seem thrust at you as you round its upper edge.

As Binns' face appeared over the crest of the pitch, we noticed he looked agitated. When asked if anything were wrong, he whispered, "I should think there is. The whole right wall of the pitch is loose, and nearly came down on me." We, also, had noticed that some of the holds were rather shaky, so when Binns had arrived, I decided to descend a short distance in order to ascertain the true state of things.

I had not gone more than about 6 feet, and was kicking about with my foot to dislodge anything loose, when a harsh, grating sound preceded the gradual departure of a huge mass of rock. I called hastily to my companions to pull in my rope, and in a moment I was chiefly dependent upon it, apparently the only stable object in my vicinity. Immediately there was a tremendous swish and a thud, followed by a deafening roar, when the mass of rock, surely well over a ton in weight, went clattering and bounding down the gully. It was an appalling sight, and the noise it made, confined in the narrow funnel, added greatly to a most nerve-shaking incident.

The departed rock had left a smooth slab upon which it had been resting, and this looked pretty sound. I therefore descended, held by the rope, and cleared away all loose rock, ultimately

joining my companions without aid. Future parties will find the ascent of this pitch slightly easier than it was, and certainly very much safer. The good handhold under the small cap-stone was not disturbed by the fall, and is still the key to the ascent.

On our right was an easy ledge leading into the gully, the one usually followed by those who do not effect the ascent of the pitch direct. The next obstacle was a short, wet chimney, which gave no trouble; above it the gully widened slightly, and a scree ledge prompted thoughts of lunch.

Fortunately we had a water-tight rücksack, so our victuals were quite dry. More necessary were the dry sweaters which it contained. We were, of course, absolutely soaked, so took off all our things and wrung them out. The comfort of a dry sweater was great, though somewhat inadequate, and we enjoyed an *al fresco* lunch in comparative dryness.

And then it came on to rain. We hurried into our cold, wet garments in a vain endeavour to keep our sweaters dry, packed up the rücksack, and, as before, looked to the interest of the climbing to divert our thoughts from the general discomfort. Nor were we disappointed. Almost immediately above us was one of the prettiest pitches in the gully; the narrow walls were spanned from side to side by several rounded boulders placed one above the other to a height of about 30 feet. This was the well-known "Jammed Boulder" pitch. The gully walls were just wide enough apart for "backing up"; they

were wet and smooth, and the boulders themselves partook of the same character: by the time we gained the crest of the pitch our efforts had produced the necessary warmth, but the sweaters were wet, greasy rolls of wool packed tightly and uncomfortably in the vicinity of our necks. The general unconventionality of it all was hugely enjoyable, however, and we hailed the appearance of the next pitch with enthusiasm.

The gully now widened out and provided climbing up slabby pitches which could be tackled in various ways, until a high wall of rock confronted us. Up the left side was a narrow chimney caused by a weathered-out "dyke." It looked rotten, and the water came straight down it.

A flank movement up some slabs to the right was therefore executed, and, after a short stretch of the easiest climbing we had yet encountered, we found to our consternation that our gully had ceased and that we were out on the breast of the mountain.

But this could not be all? It had surely never taken a strong party twelve hours to do what we had done? Just then a storm of wind whirled upward, and high above us we heard a deep, booming note. It was the chanter at work. And then the wind blew a rift in the mist, and, stretching upward in a black line to our left, we descried the continuation of the climb.

We contoured into it, and after scrambling up the broken gully-bed for a considerable distance, were brought to a standstill by a huge buttress of rock dividing the gully in two. It appeared to contain several feasible routes upward, but none

of them looked possible—if I may be pardoned the "Irishism." This was the "stack of rock" referred to by the earlier parties.

It was at this point that Messrs. Kelsall and Hallitt first put on the rope. They climbed to this height without roping! And they were almost the contemporaries of that "old school" who are always shaking their heads at the "dare-devil doings" of the present-day rock-climbers, and condemning them for their unorthodox ways. Ah, well! it is cheering to find that even this "old school" were not immaculate.

The proper means of circumventing this stack of rock is by keeping near the right-hand chimney formed by it and the main wall of the gully. This can be passed by working a few feet to the left and then crossing over a small, grassy ridge to the right, whence a traverse can be effected to the top of the pitch. However, this chimney was now the channel chosen by a heavy jet of water, and as we had had sufficient water-fall climbing for one day, we cast around for another route. An easy scramble to the left brought us into the other fork of the gully, but we were unable to continue up it further than a short rocky overhang in its bed.

When Messrs. Slade's party made their ascent they managed to throw up a rope at this point and climb up it. We attempted to do likewise, but our rope only stayed on the hitch until Harland began to climb up it, when it at once slipped off and deposited him, not too gently, on the screes below. He soon tired of this, so selected a narrow chimney in the stack itself. He climbed

upward about 20 feet, and there stopped. I was soon wedged about 10 feet below him, but of no use whatever, except to act as a buffer for the stones he kept sending down.

"It's very loose up here," he called; "but as long as they don't hit you, I might as well try cleaning it out a bit more!"

"But they are hitting me," I enlightened him; so we descended and considered what was to be done. It began to look as though the gully were to have the best of things, when I noticed to our right a grass ledge running round the nose of the "stack." Perhaps there was a way round the corner. I crept along the ledge for a few feet, and then, looking upward, descried another chimney. It was much foreshortened, and looked deceptively easy, so I called to the others to join me.

It was about 80 feet high, and took about an hour to ascend. As it was quite the most difficult bit of climbing we had that day, and was, moreover, earthy in its interior and more or less loose on its walls, it is hardly worth detailing. Although not to be recommended, it eventually landed us on the top of the stack between the two forks of the gully.

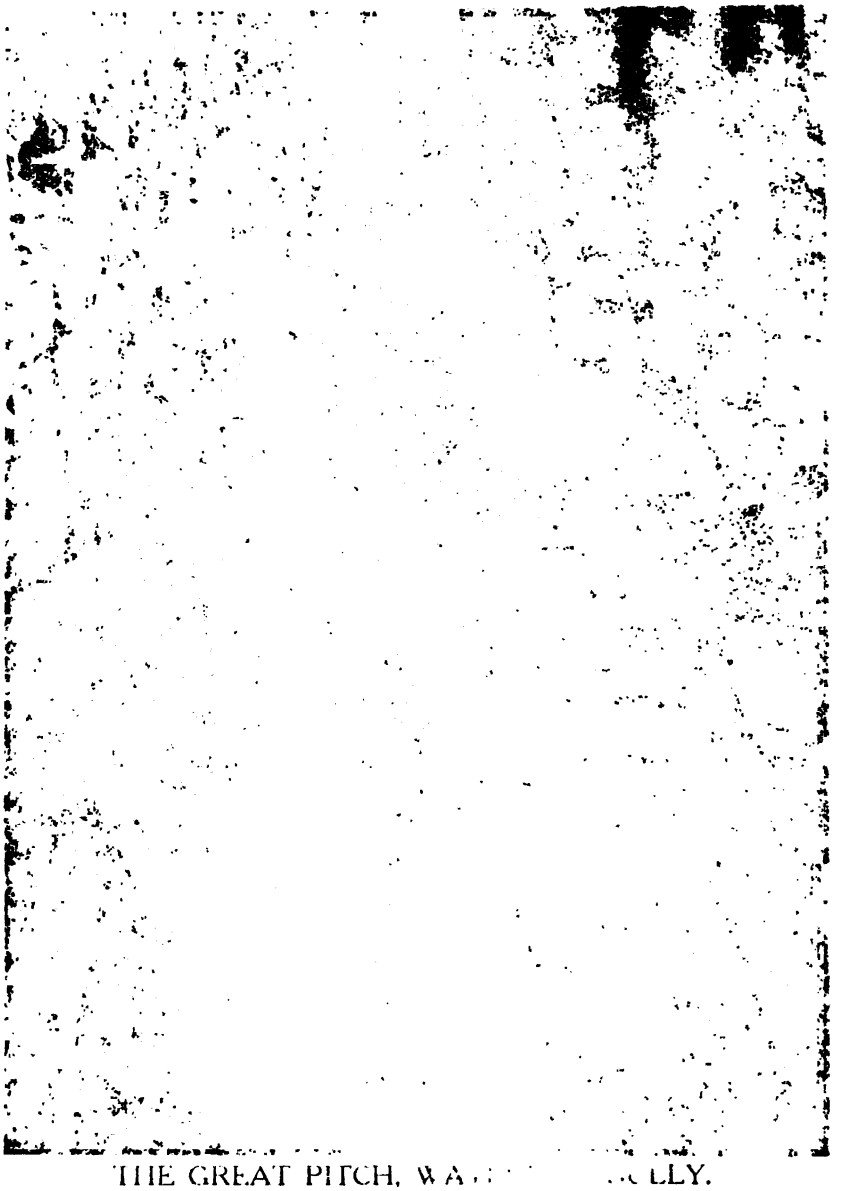
We were soon able to get into the right fork —the main gully—and made quick progress over pitch after pitch of steep rock. A mention of each would be unnecessary, even wearisome, but the whole provided most interesting climbing amongst superb rock-scenery. This part is apt to suggest that one is undergoing a punishment peculiarly fitting the past misdeeds of climbers—

to be everlastingly mounting pitch after pitch, wet through, hungry and weary, without ever getting any nearer the top.

However, as we got higher the walls of the gully became steeper and more clear cut, and the rocks were on a grand scale. Eventually we came to a pitch in true keeping with its surroundings. A slabby, wet wall of rock about 60 feet high occupied the centre of the gully; up its right-hand side a chimney started promisingly but deteriorated into an impossible-looking slab. Another chimney ran up the left-hand side. This seemed to continue to the top of the pitch, and was the only means of ascent. Water came pouring down it, augmented by the heavy rain now falling.

However, we could not think of retreating, so Harland, impervious to wet and cold, backed steadily upward for about 30 feet, where I joined him. He then climbed a little higher and came to a standstill. The water was in too much force for him to keep in the chimney, so he endeavoured to reach a small ledge on its right wall. All to no purpose, however; the step across was too long, and after repeated trials he called down to me to take the lead. I appreciated the compliment, but gently and firmly refused. A night out somewhere further down the gully would have been preferable from my point of view!

But even that did not appeal very greatly, so I compromised by climbing up to Harland and, with a foot on each side of the gully, offered him a somewhat shaky shoulder. The inter-



THE GREAT PITCH, WA[illegible]LLY.

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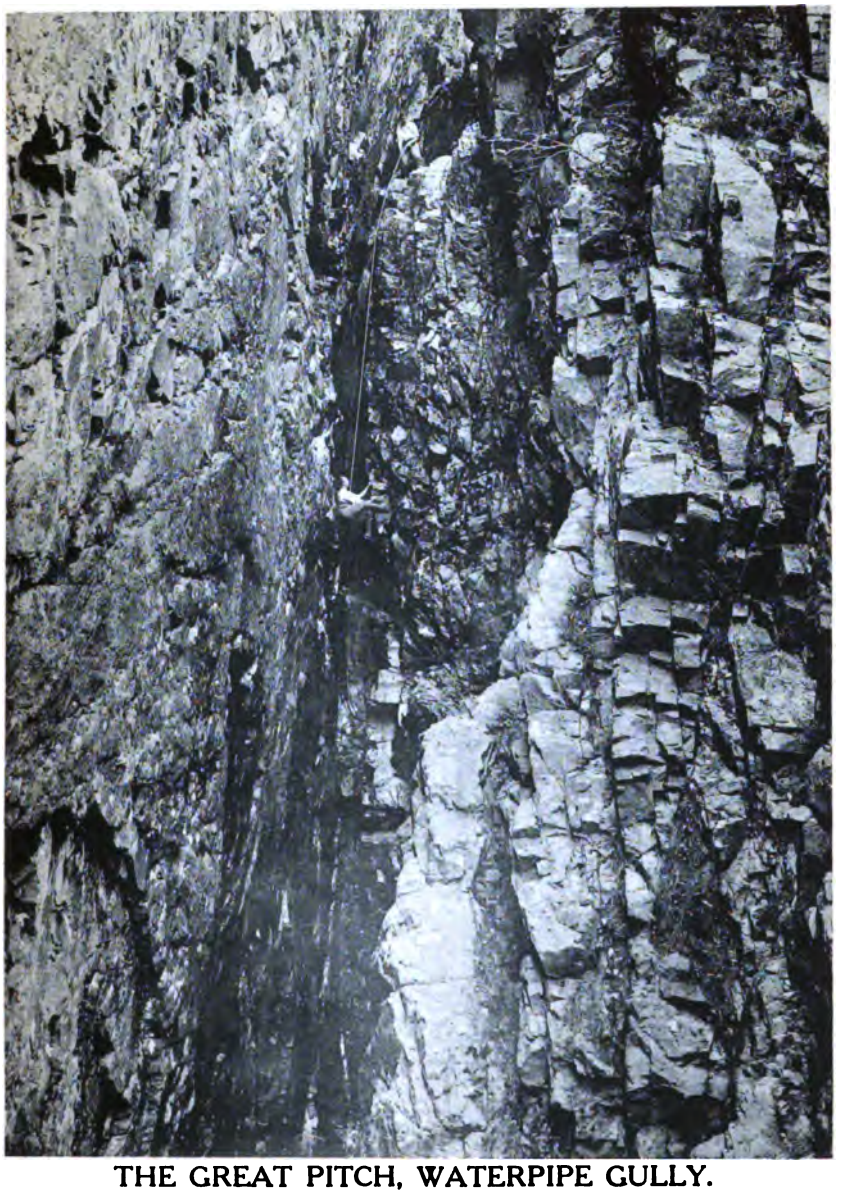


THE GREAT PITCH, WATERPIPE GULLY.

mediate step it provided was sufficient to take him across, and in a short while he disappeared from my sight over the crest of the pitch. A tug at the rope and a call to "come on" apprised me of the fact that it was my turn, so, thanks in some measure to the support of the rope, I stepped across to the wall and after climbing gingerly up a particularly disagreeable, mossy slab, joined him in a small cave at the top of the pitch.

Binns came up "like a lamplighter," but voiced the general opinion of our party when he characterised the pitch as "the stiffest of the lot!" It was certainly very difficult, and even in dry weather will require careful negotiation.

A short pitch then brought us to a natural rock arch under which we crept, and came to the next obstacle—several huge boulders wedged above each other and forming a three-storied cave. Once above these nothing remained but three easy pitches which we took "hand over hand," and shortly after reached the cairn at the top of the gully.

It was 7.30 P.M. For seven and a half hours the climb had given constant sport, with an oft-repeated uncertainty as to whether we should be beaten or not. It was still raining hard, a high wind and thick mist added to our troubles, but the Waterpipe Gully was ours, and light-heartedly we struck up to the summit ridge, where Binns took the lead. He was confident of his ability to take us down to Corrie Mhadaidh in spite of the fact that he had never seen the mountain before, so we followed him. Although, like a

certain charming small person in one of Dickens' books, he was "a guide who knew not whither he was bound," he ultimately brought us to the stream. This we followed into Corrie na Creiche, whence a steady jog-trot brought us to Bealach a'Mhaim, and, an hour later—at 10 P.M. —to Sligachan.

A very dangerous spot on the path from Bealach a'Mhaim to Sligachan merits a word of warning to those descending in the dark. This is a place where the path, at a certain corner about fifteen minutes' walk from the Bealach, is defined by a vertical wall of rock which plunges downward about 30 feet. At the bottom of this is a pretty waterfall and a deep pool. The danger is caused by the path taking a sharp turn, so that any one not seeing the corner would immediately step over into the abyss.

On the face of it, it would seem absurd to counsel putting on the rope on a well-marked path, but for half an hour hereabouts one would be quite justified in so doing on a dark night.

The place calls to mind a certain corner that once existed on the way up to the Bäregg from Grindelwald. Over this an inebriated guide once stepped, and fell a distance of about 100 feet to the rocks below. He lay till the morning and then walked home sober, none the worse for his escapade. The late Leslie Stephen, commenting on this accident, offers a choice of two morals, one of which is not to get drunk before walking along such places, and the other is to get drunk if you are going to fall over them! The latter moral hardly applies to our path,

because, provided a man reached the bottom unhurt, he would most certainly be drowned shortly afterwards.

The great pitch in the Waterpipe Gully had so much impressed us that a few days later we devoted the latter half of a wet day to taking a photograph of it, and to exploring the lower part of the gully.

We found that it was an easy matter to keep up the slabs to the right, until the traverse into the top of the "80-foot pitch" was reached. Binns and Harland took this course, traversed to the top of the pitch, and proceeded to dispose themselves in artistic attitudes for the photograph, while I chose a pinnacle of rock, lower down, which overhung the gully, and from which my camera had an uninterrupted view of the big pitch.

My position was somewhat exposed, so I took the precaution of attaching myself with a rope to the top of the pinnacle. It was exceedingly fortunate that I did so. I had just made an exposure and was putting the slide back into the rücksack, when a sudden gust of wind blew the camera over towards the gully. It was just slipping over the edge when I made a grab and caught it, but in so doing lost my balance.

A wild clutch, intended for the top of the pinnacle, but which only succeeded in securing my focussing cloth, was followed by a hazy and hurried wonder what was to happen next, when all need for prayerfulness was removed as the rope tightened round my waist and held me suspended over the gully. It was a most un-

comfortable position; but, fortunately, a small ledge was available for my camera, and after disposing of it I was easily able to regain the top of the pinnacle, none the worse for my involuntary departure, except for a slight bruising in the region of my vest, caused by the sudden jerk of the rope.

If other intending mountain photographers are likely to be similarly foolish, I hope they will remember, as being more important than a first-class photographic outfit, to attach themselves to their perch before operating from an exposed position—a necessity they will not find tabulated in the ordinary photographic text-books.

The Spur of Sgurr an Fheadain and the Summit Gully.—The rocky spur of Sgurr an Fheadain descends deep into Corrie na Creiche, ceasing at the scree only a few feet above the level floor of the corrie. The more glaring attractions of the famous gully, of which it is the left-hand retaining wall, probably account for the long neglect of this spur.

The time of those who visit Sligachan has many calls upon it. Several items on their programme are often perforce omitted.. Dozens of good climbs, or at least historical climbs, and the terms are by no means synonymous, have to be "done" before leisure is permitted for a look round for fresh ascents, and no doubt most parties think they have done their duty by such a minor peak as Sgurr an Fheadain, when they have "bagged" the Water-pipe Gully. They may be right. If, however, they at any time desire a moderately difficult, in-

teresting, and not too lengthy approach to Bidein Druim nan Ramh, the two climbs under consideration will provide it.

In passing to our camp in Corrie Tairneilear we had often looked longingly up at the great rounded spur and the chimney in its centre, and been tempted to make its closer acquaintance, but designs upon bigger "game" always intruded until an early start one June day of 1907, when we were bound for the North-west Buttress of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh, promised us time to include it in the day's climbing.

We were all the more keen because there was no record of it having been ascended, and first ascents, even in Skye, are not to be despised. Indeed, within reasonable distance of Sligachan, and this can be reached in an hour and a quarter, they are becoming very scarce. We planned to climb the gully in the face of the buttress as offering the most tempting, and certainly most feasible-looking route.

The first pitch consisted of a grassy chimney, which reminded us of some of the Welsh and Lakes climbs. The smell of the lush, wet grass and the instability of some of the ledges made us feel quite at home, and were in pleasant contrast to the "bare, pitiless, gabbro slabs" to which we had become so accustomed. A change, even for the worse, is sometimes lightsome, and Harland threw down handfuls of grass and soil upon us, chaffing us gaily the while. "You can't expect to make brand-new first ascents without a little discomfort," said he. "Nor you either," we retorted, as we gave a little tug at his rope to sober him down.

The grassy chimney was surmounted by a big rounded boulder, which is a prominent object from the foot of the climb. This was passed up the right-hand side. Above it fairly easy going gave access to a wide terrace, from the upper end of which sprang a 40-foot, deeply cut chimney, up which we "backed" in orthodox fashion.

At its top the gully took a turn to the left and then dwindled to an oblique chimney with chock-stones at the top. This gave 50 feet of thoroughly enjoyable climbing, and brought us out above the steep lower spur, near a point where we could obtain a fine view over into the Waterpipe Gully.

The continuation of the spur looked mild and uninteresting, so we contoured across the face of the mountain into the gully on the north side of the peak. This contained three good pitches, one of which, a cave formed by a huge jammed boulder, caused us a little trouble. It was climbed straight up on the left-hand side of the stone. A short rocky terrace at the top of the gully led over to the ridge, whence we soon reached the summit of the Sgurr.

After admiring the towers of Bidein, which look their best from here, we rattled down the screes into Corrie Tairneilear and lunched at our camp before consulting the weightier oracles of the northern precipices of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.

CHAPTER VIII

SGURR A'MHADAIDH

THE casual visitor to Loch Coruisk, who stands at the usual view-point at its seaward end, is probably not much impressed by the jagged ridge which fills in the central background of his view. And, indeed, Sgurr a'Mhadaidh does not look its best from here. Its chief claim to notice, that of plunging sheer down into the water of the loch, it does not in reality possess, for a good mile of level ground intervenes before its lowest spur is reached. It is too far away for its contours and buttresses, encircling the beautiful little Corrie of Solitude, to be discerned, and the four massive towers which form its summits are dwarfed and stultified. Its aspect is one of comparative mildness, and few people even trouble to inquire its name.

But from the north, as seen from Corrie na Creiche across the wild upland hollow of the Thunderer (Corrie Tairneilear) its appearance is entirely changed. Gone are the diminutive jags in the skyline; gone is the wall-like, uninteresting appearance of its front, and in their place are two massive rock-towers connected by a wild cordon of shattered precipice, jumbled crags as a whole, but beautifully sculptured in detail, falling a full thousand feet to the huge glacier-worn, boulder-strewn slabs at their base.

Sgurr a'Mhadaidh occupies an almost central position on the main ridge of the Coolin. It is separated from Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh on the south by the Ghreadaidh-Mhadaidh col,[1] and from Bidein Druim nan Ramh on the north-east by Bealach na Glaic Moire. Its aspect on the two remaining sides has already been suggested, but it may be well to emphasise the fact that the great hollow in its north flank is Corrie Tairneilear, and not, as would naturally be supposed, Corrie Mhadaidh.

Running north-westward from the south peak, the highest summit of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh, is a long sharp ridge which terminates at Sgurr Thuilm, the shapely mountain overlooking Corrie na Creiche and the upper end of Glen Brittle.

From a rock-climber's point of view Sgurr a'Mhadaidh leaves nothing to be desired. The traverse of its summit ridge, from the Ghreadaidh-Mhadaidh col to Bealach na Glaic Moire, affords more hand-to-hand climbing and necessitates a greater time to accomplish than that of any other of the Coolin. Although this is at no point difficult, every yard of it is interesting. Many fine situations are encountered, and when about midway between the peaks the sense of aloofness, of being cut off on all sides, is most striking. Although such a consideration is not supposed to carry much weight with the ardent rock-climber, the views all the way along are such as will, I know, appeal most strongly to my fellow-sportsmen. The route generally taken from Sligachan is by way of Corrie Tairneilear and thence over the ridge of

[1] This is marked on the Ordnance Survey as An Dorus, but An Dorus is the gap a few yards up the ridge of Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh.

Sgurr Thuilm to An Dorus. From here the climber works his way over the four peaks, including in the day's excursion, as time permits, Bidein Druim nan Ramh and the peaks northward along the ridge.

The precipices on the north side contain magnificent rock-climbing, much of it still to be done.

The great bastion which buttresses the most northerly peak has been climbed, and affords very fine work for two or three hours, according to the size of the party and the faithfulness with which they follow the ridge. This is called the North-west Buttress.

To the right of it the rocks are much broken up and lack continuity. They are exceedingly steep, however, and appear to be somewhat friable for some distance along, until a wide rocky terrace, starting from near the foot of the North-west Buttress, runs obliquely upward along the face and finishes on the skyline near the junction of the main ridge with the ridge of Sgurr Thuilm. This has been christened the Foxes' Rake.

About midway along the line of cliff, and near to its lowest point, a narrow gully starts upward from its foot. This is in two parts, being intersected about half-way up by the oblique rocky terrace just referred to, and taken together they form, in the opinion of those who have climbed them, the finest gully climb in Skye. And this is saying a good deal. It is known as the Slanting Gully.

The crags immediately to its right are sheer and look quite inaccessible until a black, deeply-

cut rift arrests the attention. This is a very obvious-looking climb, and was first visited by Messrs. W. W. Naismith and G. B. Gibbs in the August of 1898. Mr. Gibbs' account of it will prove of interest to those who may go there in the future. "To get above the lowest pitch, we were obliged to climb the side of Thuilm-Mhadaidh ridge, and make a long traverse back into the gully, only to find the second pitch too much for us. The leader climbed to the roof of the cave by 'back and foot,' and worked out to the front, but found it impossible to pass the dependent foremost block. What was seen of a third higher pitch was discouraging, although from the top of the gully, when entered from the Mhadaidh ridge, the higher reaches seemed moderately easy."

Several parties have "tried their hand" at it since then, but none have been successful. The great majority of them seem content to regard the second pitch as unclimbable, but Mr. Shadbolt, who climbed unaided the bottom pitch fairly close in, thinks there is a prospect of "winning through." He noticed a hole in the roof of the pitch, through which a rope might be threaded. This as a safeguard, and possibly as a help, puts a somewhat different complexion on things. I have twice gone to Skye with this gully as the *pièce de résistance* of the trip, but in both cases the weather turned bad before the end of our stay. It is not a place to attempt in bad weather. The pitch was hidden by a pretty enough waterfall, but waterfalls were at a discount with us just then. From what I saw of the place the party to try it should

have the three following qualifications, at least: the rocks should be dry; they themselves should be in good climbing trim; and, above all, they should be sufficiently experienced men to know when to turn back. The turning back will probably be the chief feature of their expedition. The name of this historic climb-in-embryo is the Deep Gash Gully. To the right of it the cliffs soon abut upon the ridge of Thuilm, where they become more shattered, and, as far as climbers are concerned, lose in interest.

The crags on the Coruisk face are on a much smaller scale, and the only continuous climbing yet done is to be found on the Buttress of the South Peak, which affords about 500 feet of moderately easy sport over good, sound rock.

In common with all the peaks to the north of it, Sgurr a'Mhadaidh is within practicable distance of Sligachan, a strong point in its favour with those climbers who prefer to explore its most remote recesses, and are not content with merely "ridge-wandering" along its skyline, delightful as this undoubtedly is.

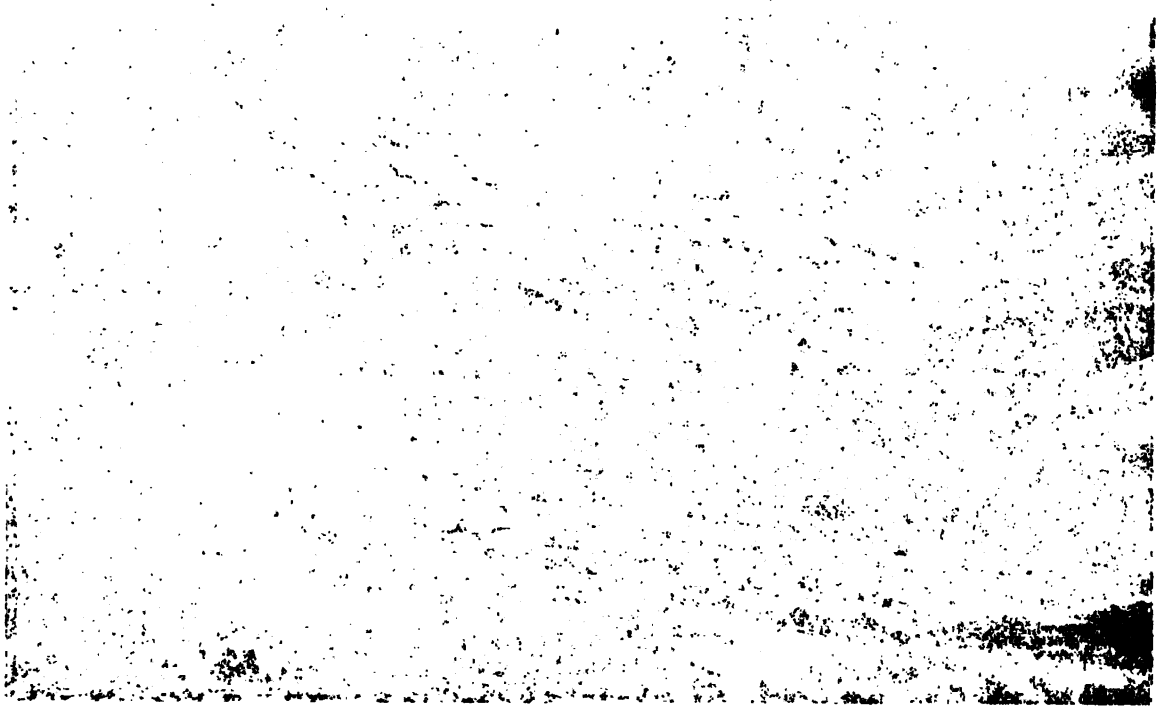
The Slanting Gully. — Ever since the time, some twelve years ago now, when I first saw the north face of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh it had been my intention to pitch a tent at its foot and explore in detail its seductive-looking precipices. But when a party of four of us, Messrs. Harland, Binns, Bartrum, and myself, proceeded to put my intention into effect in June last year, we little dreamt that all we should have to show for our trouble would be the ascent of

one gully. Our tent, for the greater part of the time a sodden mass of flattened canvas, had been up in Corrie Tairneilear for nearly a week before even this was vouchsafed to us. And yet, I think we should all be willing to repeat the performance for another day's climbing of a similar nature.

We expended much thought and time upon our arrangements. Provisions for a week's camping were procured. Harland built a tent especially for the purpose, and the whole equipment was carried in triumph, or rather in two heavily laden conveyances, to Sligachan.

June can generally be relied upon in Skye to produce a preponderance of fine days, and we had looked forward for months to our visit. But day after day passed in pouring torrents of rain, and a full week elapsed before a sufficiently fine day arrived to warrant us in making a start for our quarters. We lost no time, but when the weather cleared forthwith chartered a pony and gillie, and, with our tent and other paraphernalia securely tied to their backs, set off for Corrie na Creiche. The pony was able to take its load to the upper end of the corrie, almost to the foot of the Waterpipe Gully, where the ground became too steep for its further progress. It was therefore sent back to the inn, and in two journeys we succeeded in removing our chattels to the floor of the upper corrie, where, upon a carpet-like expanse of sloping grass beside the burn, we pitched our tent.

During this operation the day had been steadily growing worse. Though fine and sunny



CORRIE TAIRNEIL EAR

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[illegible] this operation the day had been [illegible]wing worse. Though fine and sunny

CORRIE TAIRNEILEAR AND SGURR A' MHADAIDH.

still in the corrie, a great turmoil was going on over Loch Harport. Gradually the sky became overcast with a thin veil of light vapour. We had just got all our things nicely under cover, when some dark, ragged clouds, hurrying outposts of the coming storm, blew across the veil, and in less than five minutes it began to rain. It had been our intention to climb after lunch, but this was frustrated, and we crept inside the tent, where we listened to the rain as it beat against our new canvas, until it increased to such an extent that all idea of climbing was abandoned. We had exchanged the comforts of Sligachan and its palatial accommodation for the discomfort of one small room 8 feet by 6, which, as far as we knew, might at any moment become deluged with water. And yet, in spite of this, and incredible as it may sound, we were absurdly happy. Why? It would be difficult to say. It has often puzzled me to know exactly what there should be about the dirty, lazy, disreputable camp-life that is so delightful. Perhaps the reason is to be found in the fact that, in spite of our veneer of civilisation, there is still something in us that responds to the outdoor, natural life that was the lot of our early ancestors; a primal, elemental faculty that has lain dormant for generations, but which is still alive in every healthy man. Whatever it is, it is something very deep-seated and genuine, as all those who have experienced it well know. For myself it will be a sorry day when increasing years and "the ills that life and time oppose" step in and prohibit all but civilised comforts.

About ten o'clock we crept into our sleeping bags, and, to the accompaniment of the rain driving outside and the torrents of water dashing across the slabs on all sides, slept the sleep of those who have attained a long-cherished desire.

Twelve hours elapsed, by which time the incessant rain had evidently soaked the soil around the tent, for without warning the water streamed in at the side, flooded across our waterproof ground-sheet, and ejected us. Our dry clothes and eatables were quickly wrapped in the sheet, and, after re-trenching around the tent and making all fast with an extra climbing rope, we adjourned to Sligachan drenched to the skin.

Three days later, after a terrific storm, the weather cleared in the afternoon, and Harland and Bartrum went up to inspect what might be left. The evening turned out fine, and, as they did not return, we concluded they had found the tent still there and were staying the night. The following day broke bright and cloudless, so Binns and I set off about 7 A.M. to join them.

As we contoured from Bealach a'Mhaim into Corrie na Creiche we espied a small white dot where we had left the tent, and knew it had weathered the storm. Our companions met us at the foot of Sgurr an Fheadain. After making a route straight up its western spur, a descent was made to the camp, where we lunched previous, as three of us vainly imagined, to trying conclusions with the North-west Buttress of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.

After lunch Binns set off about five minutes in advance of the rest, and it was not until the foot of the buttress was nearly attained that we saw him again. He was at the base of the great southern precipice, about a quarter of a mile away from our objective. He waved and shouted to us to go across to him. This we refused to do for some time, until we saw that his attitude was that of a man who will have his own way or none at all. In other words, he was lying on his back smoking his pipe, evidently waiting for us. Bartrum went across to see what was wrong, and, after some violent gesticulations in the direction of the crags above him, assumed the same attitude. We reluctantly crossed over to them, with minds full of abuse, until we saw the reason of their strange behaviour. Directly above them was a beautiful narrow chimney, surmounted at the top by a small chock-stone. Above it, receding one beyond the other as far as we could see, were chimneys, chock-stones, pitch after pitch, and the clean-cut walls of a gully of most alluring appearance. A great black cave, high up, completed a picture that was calculated to gladden the sight of any rock-climber worthy the name.

The North-west Buttress was at once discarded. We eagerly roped up, and moved to the attack.

Unlike most of the Skye gullies, our climb was perfectly dry, in spite of the recent rains. The rock of which the first pitch was composed gave us a foretaste of what was to come. It was sound and smooth, and "as firm as a rock." The smoothness of the walls and the rounded surfaces of the jammed stone at the top pointed

to the action of water, but this must latterly have been diverted into another channel near the top of the gully.

The lowest chimney was somewhat too wide for "backing up," so Harland and I went to its interior, but here the narrowness of the walls so constricted his movements that, in order to save time, I gave him a hoist upward to where the holds were more definite. He was soon able to get his hands on to the stone and pull himself through the hole behind it. It was a sharpish struggle, because the smooth walls provided no points against which to press the feet. Binns had kindly volunteered to carry my camera, so that I might be free, if needed, to help the leader. The hole was too small for it to pass through, so he came up on the outside of the stone, an exceedingly arduous proceeding. Immediately above us was another somewhat similar, though shorter, pitch, and then for 30 feet the going became easier. The climbing was continuous, however; the crest of each pitch was formed of firmly-wedged rounded boulders, scree being almost absent.

An obstacle of about 70 feet in height was soon encountered. The gully walls were spanned by great blocks, which formed a series of small caves placed above one another. The rock of each wall was splendid, and afforded perfect holding. As we emerged over the top of the uppermost block a magnificent pitch loomed ahead.

The walls of the gully had suddenly widened, and about 80 feet above were spanned by an immense boulder, which projected far outward. Beneath it was the great cave we had seen from the

foot of the climb. Its floor was scree-covered and extensive. At its entrance the possibility of climbing upwards looked hopeless. We scrambled to its interior, however, and there found a bridge of boulders, not unlike that beside the Collie Step in Moss Gill, Scawfell. This looked accessible from the floor of the cave. The gully walls were here near enough together to permit of "backing up," and ere long Harland had worked upward and out to the top of the bridge. He was now directly under the cap-stone of the pitch, and separated from it by about 30 feet of smooth chimney. He tried bracing across, but one wall overhung, and the other was too smooth for his boot-nails to grip. The ledges for the feet had an "absent look" about them, and promised little help, so, in order to conserve his strength, I suggested joining him and pushing him as far upward as I could reach. He accordingly took a "breather" whilst I worked upwards to the bridge. In stepping on to it my eye caught sight of a narrow ledge on the right wall, looking outward. This was at about the level of the under side of the bridge, and continued horizontally along the wall until it almost overhung the foot of the gully.

"What about that ledge?" I asked him; "why not see where it leads to?"

The prospect of "backing up" that 30 feet of smooth chimney did not particularly attract him. He was glad of the respite, and set off along the ledge to a point where it appeared to cease.

"Is there anything round the corner?" I

anxiously inquired, and the answer came back almost at once.

"Yes; this looks feasible, but it's frightfully exposed. Can you come out and steady me up the first part?"

Bartrum then came up to the bridge to allow me sufficient rope to pass along, and I then traversed outward. The situation was very fine. The wall of the gully at the end of the ledge formed a rough ridge, on the outer side of which the rocks plunged down sheer into the corrie. The way lay straight up this ridge, and was very steep. Harland climbed carefully upward, testing each hold as he went, and "holding fast that which was good," for here the rock seemed to deteriorate a little, until, when about 30 feet above me, he was able to step across to the right on to the capstone of the pitch. I immediately followed in his steps, and found the climbing easier than I had anticipated. The trouble lay more in the effect exerted on the nerves than in any intrinsic difficulty, although one steep bulge about half-way up still dwells in my memory.

When Bartrum arrived we were surprised to find that he carried the camera. It appeared that his companion thought the pitch ought to be climbed straight upward from the bridge, and was anxious to see how it would go with the rope held from above. We accordingly proceeded to make ourselves comfortable, and took in the rope, while our rear man disported himself lower down. He revels in a good chimney, and has a fine knack in "backing up," but his progress for some time was slow, in spite of the strenuousness of his

efforts. Presently he came nearer; then we heard his boot-nails on the rocks, and shortly afterwards a very red face appeared over the edge, emitting as it came an urgent request to "keep the rope in." He was evidently nearly exhausted. Another yard or two brought him to our level, breathless. He had not actually used the rope, but gave it as his opinion that it would not be a nice place up which to lead. We agreed with him. A stretch of 30 feet of "backing up" between walls which are almost devoid of holds makes too much call upon the endurance, be a man's skill what it may, and following parties will probably favour the way *viâ* the ledge.

Above this pitch the climbing became easier for a while, but never lost interest. It strongly reminded us of the best parts of the Intermediate Gully on Dow Crags. There was the same smooth, clean rock, entirely free from vegetation and loose stones. A feature of this section was the huge slab which formed the right wall of the gully, springing upward unbroken for a visible height of well over 200 feet. The neatest pitch hereabouts was a 35-foot chimney, which could be climbed in orthodox fashion throughout, with the feet on the left wall and the back on the other.

Above this the gully widened considerably until, a short distance higher, it landed us out on the wide rocky terrace known as the Foxes' Rake. This we had anticipated when we started at the foot of the gully, but had hoped that the upper continuation would prove vulnerable, and that the two sections would combine to form a continuous climb.

We came out of the lower gully all anxiety to know what lay above us, and each emerged with the same thought uppermost. It found expression in the exclamations, "Well, what's it like?"

"That's the proper road" those above, pointing upward across the rake. Each was left to draw his own conclusions; and even the most rash of us was somewhat taken aback. And not without cause, for the two vertical cracks, each about 40 feet high and both overhanging at the bottom, were what we saw.[1] These converged at their upper extremities into a small cave, which also overhung. Above this rose the narrow continuation of the gully, which dwindled again higher up to an overhanging crack which scarcely merited a second glance before being pronounced impossible.

Added to these difficulties was the consideration that time was already 7.30, but, as one of us remarked, it would do us no harm to pass the night here. Truly, an enforced week's idleness in which to begets much enthusiasm. This point settled, we sat down on the terrace and studied the cracks. The left-hand one certainly looked the more encouraging. It would at any rate make a good photograph. I jocularly proposed to Harland that if he would go and climb I would stay below and take him in the act.

We turned inquiringly to Bartrum, who agreed to sacrifice his shoulders in a good cause. Together they accordingly moved across the rake

[1] The opposite gives a good idea of the topography of this climb; but, taken from underneath, it is necessarily foreshortened, and the cracks appear more vertical.

THE CRACKS PITCH, SLANTING GULLY.
SGURR A' MHADAIDH.

and climbed a short chock-stone pitch, which brought them to the foot of the cracks.

For about 15 feet Harland worked upward, apparently without much difficulty, and there came to a standstill. But that was where Bartrum came in. He climbed up to behind the leader and proffered his shoulder. This was graciously accepted, and before long the crack was regained above the overhang. Another 10 feet of hard work again gave them pause. Harland was now in a small cave, from the impending top of which a thinner continuation of the crack sprang upward.[1] Bartrum again went to the rescue, and the same tactics as before were resorted to. A small belay in the back of the cave rendered the proceedings justifiable, and once fairly in the upper crack the leader, by dint of jamming his left knee and hand inside and obtaining some small support with his right foot on a slab, succeeded in struggling upward, amid great excitement, for the situation was most exposed, to the upper cave. Here he found good anchorage, and jubilantly shouted across to us to "come on."

"Can you get higher?" we inquired.

"Not without help," he responded ambiguously. More he would not tell us, so, while Bartrum joined him in the cave, Binns and I packed up the camera and hurried across to the foot of the pitch.

"Look out for the rope" soon came from above, and the next moment its coils came swishing down the rocks. An 80-foot length failed

[1] The upper figure in the photo overleaf indicates the place now reached.

to reach us, so we climbed the little pitch, and I was then just able to tie on.

The heavy rücksack did not conduce to elegance in the crack, but I was able to climb into the cave half-way up without using the rope. To get out of it was another matter, and I am not ashamed to admit receiving a little assistance in rounding the overhang. Above this the going was somewhat less difficult, but its exposed nature rendered it very exhilarating. I soon joined the others in the cave, and our rope was sent down for our last man. He came up in great style, but was no little impressed by the crack. Our resting-place was fairly commodious, so the others built a small cairn, whilst I resumed my previous position on the rope before proceeding.

The escape from the roof of the cave proved easier than we had expected, but above it the climbing was continuously of a high standard, both technically and in actual altitude. The gully was very narrow, and too steep for scree to collect. The pitches could only be defined by those jammed boulders at the top of which anchorage could be obtained. In reality the climbing above the cave for about 200 feet was up one pitch of that height until it gave out on a sloping scree ledge, about the size of a door-mat, at the foot of the overhanging crack at the top of the gully. This looked just about as impossible as a crack can look, but so flushed with success was our leader that he insisted upon, as he said, "having a shot at it." We had already noticed an outward sloping ledge, which ran up to the right to a corner on the face of the cliff, and I favoured

an inspection of this route; but I could scarcely refuse to help Harland in the crack, so paid out his rope for a few feet, while he worked upward. For a short distance he made headway, and then stopped. Five minutes later a request came down for my shoulder, so I followed him as far as possible, and, with a knee and hand in the crack as my chief support, supplied his need. He thus gained a couple of feet in altitude, but still could not reach a handhold.

"I think there's something a foot higher," he gasped. "Can you hold me if I come off in trying to reach it?" A roar of dissent came from us all three simultaneously. None of us were placed to withstand such a jerk, so he beat a retreat to his old position. He was quite exhausted, and forced to accept the inevitable defeat; but then a bold man spoke up, who felt sure he knew how to do it.

He said his scheme would necessitate a shoulder, however, so I ruled it "out of order" at once. I had been stepped about on quite enough for one day and declined more, so we next turned our attention to the ledge. It was now becoming dusk, and if the corner above it should prove unclimbable, we should perforce have to spend the night out in our present position, a by no means pleasant prospect.

Harland traversed carefully upward for 30 feet to the corner, but, as we feared, found the crags above it quite inaccessible. Further round still was what looked like a continuation of the ledge, however, but intervening was a steep corner which overhung the face of the cliff. In the twilight it

looked much worse than it was. I climbed up to the corner in order to assist in its passage, but Harland got across without much trouble, and up to the continuation of the ledge, where he obtained good anchorage. Here I soon joined him, and the others came along as quickly as possible.

The rounding of the corner was a very daring piece of work, and exerted a most stimulating influence upon the imagination. As the last man was coming across a pebble fell from it, and after an appreciable lapse of time struck the rocks hundreds of feet below. Each conjectured the time it had taken in falling, and the man on the corner hazarded five minutes. It was not quite as long as that, but his guess was interesting as showing what a lot of life can be crammed into a short time when on such a place. He had experienced all the thoughts and sensations of five minutes in about as many seconds.

The ledge now widened for a distance of about 4 yards, and then ceased at the foot of a vertical arête, which would evidently take us to the top of the crags. The rocks were here more weathered, affording good holds, and the arête continued unbroken for about 50 feet. After what we had climbed it seemed quite easy. The rock was rough gabbro, the direct antithesis in character to that we had lately ascended, and landed us on the screes on the breast of the mountain.

Here we built a cairn and then hurried upward over tumbled boulders and broken rocks to the crest of the main ridge, striking it about midway between the four peaks of Mhadaidh.

It was now nearly dark, and a chill wind blew up out of Coruisk. But the scene that burst on our gaze was one that compelled a halt. None of us had actually been on the ridge at night, and we then saw this wonderful land under an entirely new aspect. And it was as though we had never before seen it at its best. The impression conveyed by the Coolin, even in the daytime, is one which no other mountainous district quite reproduces. They have a spirit, an atmosphere, an individuality which at times pervades one's whole being. That night it was as if their influence were intensified to the utmost extent to which human faculties could respond. On every hand the gloom caused the rocks to appear imbued with the indefinable attraction that the Coolin exert on those who are in sympathy with them. It was a quality of beauty and delight, tinged with just the faintest shade of mystery and fear. That the loch, nestling thousands of feet below us, and "raving round the throne of solitude" in the deep hollow which opened to the sea, was Coruisk, did not seem to matter; nor that the great black wall opposite was Blaven; or that the point further along the ridge was Sgurr Dearg. The impression conveyed by the whole scene was a single psychological emotion, towards which all visible things—the mountains, the storm-swept corries, the sea, the sky, and the clouds hurrying across it—conduced.

Those who have only seen the Coolin in storm, through ragged rifts blown in the clouds by the fierce wind, or in sunshine, when their every corrie and ravine glistens through a blue shimmering

haze, have only an inadequate idea of what they can cause a man to feel. Their impression upon one of us at least that midsummer night was one more intense and profound than any other mountain-land has produced.

But all too soon we had to turn our attention to other things. In broad daylight the contemplation of a night out on the hills without cover does not seem very dreadful. But the reality at the time, when one is tired, hungry, and cold, is another matter. We moved as quickly as we could along the ridge, and soon surmounted a pinnacle beyond which we clambered down to the wild shattered ravine which separates it from the South Peak. This ravine on the Sgurr Thuilm side contains a tumbled chaos of gigantic boulders wedged from wall to wall. Between these we scrambled downward in the light of faith, for we had no other, and ere long emerged on the crest of the branch ridge. Fortunately I had already traversed this on a previous occasion, and retained a sufficiently good idea of the locality to enable us to strike the right route. This lay to the left, slightly down into Coire a'Ghreadaidh for some distance, and then across the top of a steep gully to the ridge again. Some people hold a fond delusion that it never becomes dark in Skye during June; but, although the night was starry and the sky clear, that was as like a dark night as any I have ever seen. We slipped and tumbled down the screes into Corrie Tairneilear past the Deep Gash Gully, now only distinguishable as a black rift in the crags high above us.

Half an hour of more or less painful progress

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... hour of more or less ... progress

LOCHS CORUISK AND SCAVAIG FROM SGURR A' MHADAIDH.

brought us, at 11.30 P.M., to the welcome shelter of our tent. And thankful we were that we had not to walk to Sligachan, for two of us had been going more or less continuously for sixteen hours, a spell that is but rarely exceeded even in the ascent of the giants of Switzerland. Soup was quickly prepared, and then we crept wearily into our sleeping bags, after as grand a day on the rocks as it has ever been my good fortune to share.

The second ascent was made by Mr. L. G. Shadbolt and his sister, who endorsed our opinion that the finest gully climb yet done in Skye is that of the Slanting Gully of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.

Early next morning we were awakened by a muffled, rattling noise. Some one untied the end of the tent and thrust out his head to ascertain the reason. It was not far to seek, for just then a gust of wind came along and blew in a sheet of water, which caused a quick withdrawal of the head, and was the general signal for a hasty uprising in the four corners of the tent. The bad weather had again returned; the water soon came roaring down the burn and converted it into a torrent; the rounded slabs of the corrie became huge water-slides down which the white foam dashed promiscuously, all hot-foot to find a resting-place below. We soon followed its example. All was again made fast, and we departed wet, but well content, for Sligachan.

We were met on the way by Dr. and Mrs. Wallace who, in their Sunbeam car, had arrived the day before. Their advent, and a clearance

in the weather, brought within the bounds of possibility a project which I had long cherished —a visit to the Quiraing. Although this is situated a long way from Sgurr a'Mhadaidh, and is perhaps somewhat out of place in a chapter dealing with it, I venture to mention our trip there, because I have many times been asked by climbers if these weird rocks contain any climbing.

Dr. Wallace had brought his car partly to facilitate our exploration of the southern end of the ridge, and as we sped along the road from Portree to Uig that day we all agreed that its use possessed certain advantages over camping.

Police-traps are as scarce as railways on the island, and in little over an hour we had covered the forty odd miles that lay between Sligachan and the top of the steep hill leading down to Kilmaray. Here the car was run into the roadside (intentionally, of course!) and we strolled along the fellside for a mile at the foot of a vegetation-covered precipice, which then terminated and allowed us a passage through a vast rock-door, at the portal of which stood the most bizarre-looking object in the way of pinnacles I have ever seen. It was the far-famed Needle Rock of the Quiraing.

"Neat thing in pinnacles!" some one exclaimed. "Don't you fancy yourself stuck on the top?" Such a situation sometimes comes to one in a nightmare after a very exciting day on the rocks; and, indeed, the whole thing might have been the outcome of a disordered

imagination. How it contrives to maintain an upright position seems almost incomprehensible, for it is well over 100 feet high, and overhangs its base on almost all sides. There will surely be a fine downfall there some day; provided the spectators are on the opposite side to that upon which it falls it will be well worth seeing. In the meantime it is a wonderful thing to look at, but absolutely inaccessible.

We passed it on our right and scrambled up a steep path to the top of a level platform, surrounded by a vast amphitheatre of vegetation-covered crags and fantastic spires. The scene was a most impressive one, and wild in the extreme, but, unlike that of the Coolin, of a wildness that was repellent. The rocks were treacherous, crumbling, and undercut. The whole recalled to my mind the interior of a vast building, long since roofless and falling into ruin and decay. It may be that some desultory scrambling could be found amongst the ruin, but it is more as a spectacle than as a field for climbing that it will be visited. A couple of hours were passed in sight-seeing, after which we retraced our steps to the car, and thence back to Sligachan, glad to have seen the Quiraing, but somewhat disappointed to find no decent climbing there.

The North-west Buttress, Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.—The ascent of this was first made by Messrs. Collie, Parker, Howell, and Naismith in September 1896, and since then it has been repeated many times.

The buttress rises in four tiers, the lowest

of which is but little above the floor of the corrie. The angle of this is fairly easy and permits of a variety of routes being taken up it. Perhaps that by way of the obvious weathered-out trap dyke in its centre is the most definite, but the rock is friable, and for this reason it is best to follow the lead of the party which made the first ascent, and skirt around this lowest tier, starting the climb at the one above, which is somewhat steeper.

This also has a narrow gully in its centre, which was the route chosen by my party of 1906. A cairn was placed at its foot. For about 200 feet the going was so easy that we all moved simultaneously until, tiring of the monotony, we struck off to the right and then straight upward, thus securing better sport. The top of this portion was soon reached. It had engendered a feeling of disappointment, and we wished for something steeper and more definite.

As we emerged on to the grassy terrace at its top we looked upward and found our wish more than gratified, for straight in front of us was a bare, steep bastion of rock, obviously overhanging at a height of about 100 feet above its base. The day was very wet, and the water streaming down the buttress prohibited any attempt upon it then, but a subsequent visit on a fine day has shown me that this part of the buttress is the crux of the course. For 100 feet or so the climbing straight up is very good and leads by way of steep rocks, containing a variety of fairly difficult climbing, to a point where the crags become perpendicular.

As they steepen they lose their firm quality, and it is then necessary to traverse away to the right into a shallow gully, whence, a few feet higher, a narrow ledge leads back to the nose of the buttress above the overhanging part. The ledge is formed by a trap dyke of softer rock, which has weathered out and left a sort of horizontal chimney. The mode of progression is undignified but safe. With the right arm and leg in the groove, and the other limbs over the sheer face of the cliff, the strain comes chiefly on a part of the anatomy little fitted to bear it. At the end of this "stomach traverse," which in the actual passage is quite reminiscent of its famous prototype on the Pillar Rock, is a small cairn, which was erected by Dr. Collie in 1896.

The way straight up the outside of the buttress has often been essayed, but without success.

The experience of one party there does not encourage further attempts. Their leader was about 30 feet above his comrades, who had been unable to find a belay for the rope. Whilst feeling about for a hold, the leader touched a large piece of rock with his hand, and was horrified to feel it topple over. It fell straight downwards towards those below, and dropped between them, striking simultaneously the rope and the slab on which they were standing. Fortunately the rope was cut clean in two, and the rock went bounding down the buttress, leaving the free end dangling from the leader's waist. He was able to climb down to his friends; after joining up their rope they hastened out of the unwholesome locality with all speed, devoutly thankful that the rock

had struck the rope where it lay on the slab, and not in mid-air, when it must inevitably have dislodged them.

To return to our ascent, the middle tier of the buttress is bounded on the right (or south) side by a shallow gully, dividing it from a subsidiary buttress which rather reminds one of a lean-to shed against a main building. The gully itself was streaming with water, and looked very difficult at the bottom, so we followed the ledge around still further until a steep corner gave promise of access to a higher level. After building a cairn, we tackled the corner, which afforded 30 feet of really good climbing. Above it the rock was sheer, but a curious groove in its face allowed us to climb upward for about 60 feet, a really difficult stretch, to a ledge which took us around into the gully. This we followed upward until an obvious way presented itself to the left to the top of the middle tier of the buttress.

The third and uppermost tier now arose ahead. A long, easily inclined slab impinged upon a steep wall of rock, about 25 feet high. We "backed up" a neat chimney which seamed its right-hand end, and then hurried over broken rocks, in the driving rain, to the north summit of the mountain. Thence a hurried descent was made to Bealach na Glaic Moire and by way of Coire a'Mhadaidh and Bealach a'Mhaim to Sligachan.

In descending from the North Peak of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh to Corrie Tairneilear it is well to remember to keep along the ridge till the Bealach

is reached. The North-west Buttress is bounded on the north by a long wall of cliff, which contains three deeply cut gullies, and this intercepts all possibility of reaching the corrie, except by way of the screes which take one down from the Bealach. A cairn marks the exact spot on the main ridge at which to begin the descent.

As far as I am aware, the gullies themselves have not been climbed, but they look accessible, and in a dry season would probably well repay an enterprising party.

The Foxes' Rake.—The ascent of this involves very little climbing, although at many places a use of the hands will be found necessary. In clear weather it forms the best approach to the South Peak, being infinitely preferable, both as regards interest and rock scenery, to the route usually taken over the ridge of Sgurr Thuilm.

When the clouds are down, however, its lowest extremity may be enveloped and somewhat difficult to "hit off." It brings the climber out on the branch ridge immediately below its point of junction with Sgurr a'Mhadaidh. Just before gaining the crest a fine rock-tower, bounded by a short, deeply cut gully, will be noticed. This contains two pitches, the lower a short one of the single jammed boulder variety, and the upper a fine chaos of wedged blocks, behind which it is easy to climb to the gap between the rock-tower and the South Peak.

The South-east Buttress.—This face of the South Peak of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh is cleft by a well-marked gully, of the ascent of which I have been unable to find any record. It is bounded on

the right (north) by a steep, well-defined buttress, whose lowest spur impinges upon the upper screes of Coire an Uaigneis, the beautifully named Corrie of Solitude, high up on the breast of the mountain above Coruisk. This buttress looks most inviting and awaits the advent of a party with sufficient energy to undertake the long trudge to its foot from Sligachan. It would be easily reached from a camp at Coruisk, and it is to be hoped that those who next take up their abode there will pay it a call.

The buttress to the south of the gully was climbed in 1897 by a party led by Mr. W. Brown. "It was not a long climb—about 800 feet in all—but what there was of it was very steep . . . the party got a capital climb up continuously steep rocks without having to pass any exceedingly difficult pitches." So runs the account of those who climbed it, and it leaves little more to be said. The climb is typical of many of the Coolin face climbs. An incline which would be difficult or impossible elsewhere is rendered not only safe, but fairly easy by the roughness of the rock and its freedom from vegetation. In almost all its length the route can be considerably varied, and for this reason little is to be gained by describing it in detail.

CHAPTER IX

SGURR NA BANACHDICH AND SGURR A'GHREADAIDH

Sgurr na Banachdich.—Until quite recently the four peaks of the main ridge immediately north of Sgurr Dearg were known collectively as Sgurr na Banachdich (the Small-pox Peak). Nowadays only three of these are so called, for the most northerly has been christened Sgurr Thormaid (Norman's Peak) in honour of Professor Norman Collie.

It is to be hoped that before long some one of originality, and possessing the courage of his convictions, will come forward and give names to the other two, so that ultimately the present name of the highest peak also may be superseded by one more romantic and less unpleasant. It will need a very bold man to do this, however, for the conservatism of the Coolin lovers is great, and much obloquy will fall to his portion.

The sides of the great hollow on its south-east are dotted here and there with patches of mottled and spotted rock, which doubtless suggested the name of Coire na Banachdich, and the peak has been called after it.

Of the three summits, the most northerly is the highest, being of the same altitude as Sgurr

nan Gillean. Its ascent, by way of Coire a'Ghreadaidh and the little Coir' an Eich, is quite easy and involves no climbing. From the roadway in Glen Brittle it looks quite formidable, however, and Professor Forbes said of it in his day that "it *might*, perhaps, be accessible on the Brittle side."

Running eastward from the highest point is a branch ridge which extends outward to the glen and terminates at Sgurr nan Gobhar. From this ridge yet another branch runs N.N.W. for a short distance. This is called An Diallaid, and it throws down a steep cliff into Coire a'Ghreadaidh.

The main ridge hereabouts is much serrated, but the gaps are easy of passage, and the climber must look to Coire na Banachdich for his sport. The faces overlooking Coreachan Ruadha and Coruisk probably contain some difficult work, but little has been done on them, and it is likely that the outward dip of the rock on this side would militate against the pleasure of the climbing.

The Banachdich Gully and its Walls.—The head of Corrie Banachdich is a semicircular wall of rock, in the centre of which is the black, deeply cut rift which is the gully under consideration.

It is a noticeable feature of the corrie as seen from the road near Glen Brittle House, and is one of the first climbs to claim the attention of those staying in the glen. On either side of it the rocks are steep but firm, those on the left affording an excellent stretch of good rock-climbing.

One showery autumn day a large party of us sallied out of our quarters, intending, when we reached the rocks, to split up into two sections, one of which would take the gully and the other the left-hand wall. By dint of much sheltering on the leeward side of boulders we managed to keep dry, and at the same time discussed at length how we should divide. All sorts of peculiar reasons were advanced in praise of the climb up the wall, but all were willing to sacrifice themselves and climb the gully. It seemed ultimately that altruism would be pushed to such a length that all would climb the gully, an unsafe proceeding with such a large party, until some one diffidently suggested that he would be willing to climb the wall, if a friend would accompany him. He was studying the gully through a pair of field-glasses, and, as these were handed round, a revulsion of opinion set in. Truth to tell, it was streaming with water, and, by the time we reached its foot, it was obvious that a thorough wetting awaited the gully contingent. Harland and I had expressed a strong preference for it, however, and we hardly dared to back out.

Our courage was strengthened by the sight of the first pitch. This was a slabby, open chimney with a chock-stone at the top. Down it came a fine waterfall; the other contingent warmed to the route up the wall. I had noticed a groove running up to the left of the water, however, and it was the sight of this that had determined us to proceed. We scrambled up to the foot of the pitch, thence crossing an

awkward slab to the left, and along the groove to a small recess about 20 feet up. When we had got thus far a heavy shower came sailing up the corrie; we crouched in our recess and smiled as we saw the others hurrying to shelter.

A yard on our left, as we faced outward, the water rushed over the pitch, gaining in volume as the shower increased until it became quite a fine sight. We were duly admiring it, and congratulating ourselves on our snug corner, when an alarming thing happened. The water coming down the pitch seemed to diminish, and at the same moment we were smitten violently from above by an icy cascade which nearly swept us from our perch. For some unaccountable reason the main mass of water was now coming down our groove and threatened at any moment to dislodge us. We were drenched to the skin, but this was a minor consideration; a few moments more and we should be washed out like rats from a drain. I shouted through the roar of water to Harland to swing down while I held the rope. This he did unquestioningly, and when he had arrived I passed the rope round a spike of rock, which most opportunely existed, and shouted to him to pull me across when I reached his level. I slid down hand over hand, and he then grabbed an ankle and landed me in great style, after which we hurried downward a few feet out of the torrent.

When the shower had ceased we went back to pull down the hitched rope, and then scrambled to the mouth of the gully and compared notes.

We were drenched and cold; our lunch was a mass of sticky pulp, out of which we rescued Harland's kodak and a small tin of potted meat; for the rest, we had done our best and the wall contingent were rendered happy, so what matter? The whole thing was a huge joke as it happened, but the incident was worth remembering, for had we been higher up and without a spike of rock round which to hitch the rope, there would have been the makings of a nasty accident. Where the rocks are so free from earth and vegetation all the rain that falls immediately runs down on the surface, and in a deeply cut gully is apt to be of serious import.

We suggested to the others that they should try the gully, but they had already started their climb and expressed themselves as perfectly satisfied with it. It would have been unsafe for us to have followed in their wake, so we tackled the opposite wall of the gully instead. With due solemnity a cairn was built to mark the foot of our climb, after which a shallow scoop in the face was followed upward for about 150 feet to the foot of a steep nose of rock. This was climbed straight up and brought us out on a fine slab, which gave a splendid stretch of climbing. The upper part was rendered very difficult by a heavy shower which flooded the rocks, and, incidentally, supplied us with a change of water.

From the top of the slab we had a fine view across the gully of the other party, who were traversing across a vertical face and looked like three flies on a wall, except, perhaps, that they

did not look quite so safe. A friend of mine, who wished to start climbing, but feared the risk, once dreamt that he saw four "blue-bottle" flies creeping up a window pane. In his dream they changed to four climbers working up a steep face; he accepted the omen and took to climbing, but even now he tells me he still has an idea that the "bluebottles" are safer!

From the top of our slab, fairly easy going brought us to another nose of rock which necessitated combined tactics, and afforded 30 feet of good sport. Above this, broken rocks led us over a steadily diminishing angle to the point where the rocks merged into a wilderness of scree. Here we traversed across the top of the gully, and waited for the other party.

A subsequent visit to the Banachdich Gully has shown me that in dry weather it would make a very fine climb. It contains four excellent pitches, all of which, however, can be turned on the left-hand side. The lower two were climbed straight up on this later occasion, but the process damped our ardour and wetted our persons to such purpose that we were glad to obviate the others on the left wall.

The top pitch is a beauty, and was climbed straight up through a hole on the left, and thence by way of a traverse to the top of an overhanging block, by Messrs. G. B. Gibbs and W. Wickham King with John Mackenzie in August 1898, when the gully was first ascended.

Cheery voices coming up through the mist below us soon materialised into the other party,

who quickly scrambled up to our level, full of enthusiasm about their climb.

My brother, who was leading, took notes for me on the way up, and these read somewhat as follows: A cairn was built at the lowest point of the left wall of the gully, after which the route went straight ahead up a series of slabs and shallow cracks, for about 100 feet, to the base of a steep nose. Here it was best to turn to the left, across a somewhat holdless slab, until a recess containing good anchorage was reached. Straight above this a short chimney, decorated with loose spikes of rock, gave access to a shallow crack slightly to the left, where another cairn was built. A traverse was then made further to the left to some easy slabs, which, about 100 feet higher, gave out upon a wide and almost level space upon the mountain side.

The same point was reached by Dr. Collie (who was the first to climb the wall) by a route which started just inside the entrance to the gully.

At the convergence of the routes a traverse nearly 100 feet in length led to the right to a conspicuous cairn, built on a ledge overhanging the Banachdich Gully. From this cairn a curious traverse back at a higher level along a horizontal trap dyke took them for a few yards across the face of the almost vertical cliff. The traverse ended at a cleft in the wall; this was climbed directly upwards for some 20 feet, after which some easy slabs landed them amongst large screes, a considerable distance above the level of the top pitch of the gully. The height of the

climb was fully 500 feet, and the interest was maintained at a high standard throughout.

After joining forces we trudged up to the lowest point of the main ridge. This is the Bealach Coire na Banachdich, the easiest route between Glen Brittle and Coruisk. In taking this pass from Glen Brittle, the wall at the head of Coire na Banachdich is obviated by keeping up a scree gully slightly on the Sgurr Dearg side, whence it is a rough but easy walk to the Bealach.

As we sat in the mist on the sheltered Coruisk side of the ridge and had lunch, we discussed the possibility of traversing the main ridge from end to end in a day. Perhaps the fact that Dr. A. W. Wakefield, whose record great walk over the Lakeland tops is common property in climbing circles, was one of our party, accounted for our topic of conversation. It is one that is much discussed by those who visit the Coolin. As far as I know, the traverse has not yet been seriously attempted in its entirety, and opinions regarding it vary very greatly. Some good authorities declare it to be impossible, while others, whose opinion should carry weight, hold an entirely opposite view. Among these latter I number myself, but I must admit that it is doubtful whether the various qualifications necessary to success will ever be possessed by any one man.

Amongst other things he would need to have exceptional physique and staying power; to be a quick, skilful, and neat rock-climber (particularly would he need to be neat, for otherwise

his hands would be torn to pieces before he got half-way); to possess an intimate knowledge of the entire length of the ridge, and a familiarity with its various *mauvais pas*. Perfect weather, a light rope to "double" for descents, and a carefully arranged commissariat would be essential. Moreover, I think it would be advisable to start at the southern end of the ridge, because a fatigued man might find himself "pounded" at the short side of the Tearlach-Dubh Gap.

Whether the game would be worth the candle, for the attendant risks would be considerable, and whether it is desirable that the Coolin should be treated with such disrespect, are points which each must settle for himself; but personally I think that the expressive *Dummheit* of the Swiss guides would justly describe such a performance!

About this we were pretty well agreed, as we gathered together our traps and scrambled along the ridge towards the "Inaccessible."

Two of our party had not been up it, and a certain good-natured expert lightly consented to take the lead.

It was certainly raining fast and the rocks were cold, but even so the difference between the difficulty on a fine day and as it was then seemed out of all proportion. Our expert "waltzed" up to the wall below the mantel, and here suddenly came to a stop. Fifteen minutes of trial in various directions and attitudes found him at the same level, and it was only when I climbed up and gave him a shoulder that he succeeded in dragging himself

on to the mantel. It is doubtful whether the short side could have been safely led up without aid that day, and it was quite refreshing to note the respectful tone in which it was afterwards referred to by those who then climbed it for their first time. Even its warmest admirers would have been pleased.

Half an hour later saw us running down Sron Dearg in a heavy shower, which impressed upon us anew the fact that even in these degenerate days it can still rain in Skye.

The Window Tower.—This pleasant little climb is really situated on Sgurr Dearg, but it is also a feature of Coire na Banachdich, and for this reason it finds a place in this section.

In looking up the corrie from the main road, it is seen in profile on the right and strongly reminds one of the Parson's Nose in North Wales. Here is the same steep lower buttress culminating in a sharp pinnacle, the same gully running up to the gap above it, and a similar but somewhat steeper upper continuation. This Window Tower is on a rather larger scale, however, and gives a better climb.

In most mountainous districts there is a single course that typifies the climbing the district contains. If a man were to ask me to show him a single example which is most typical of the Coolin climbs, I think I should instance this buttress. It "hits off" the standard of difficulty which is most often encountered. Rough gabbro is here of the roughest, and demonstrates the ease with which it allows vertical places to be overcome.

A short hour's walk from Glen Brittle takes one to the foot of the Tower. It is just the "fancy" of the latter half of a showery day; but it may serve another purpose. There are very few climbers who stay at Sligachan but take a tramp down Glen Brittle to visit the Inaccessible Pinnacle, and most of these pound up the long steep nose of Sgurr Dearg, finding it painfully monotonous. I would strongly advise that the way to the pinnacle should be *viâ* the Window Tower, for the extra time involved is negligible, and the day's pleasure will be very greatly enhanced.

The climb starts from a cairn at the lowest point of the buttress. A small vertical pinnacle directly above one's head is the first objective, and its ascent, about 30 feet in all, is quite entertaining. From its top the route bears slightly to the right, and brings one out on a wide terrace, where stands another cairn.

The rocks are then more broken, but the climbing presents many points of interest, gabbro and otherwise. At one place the surfaces are weathered to such an extent that small "pockets," just wide enough to accommodate the fingers and boot-toes, have been formed. This part gives out in a rectangular corner, the climb up which is stiff, until, almost without warning, the climber finds himself looking through a curious hole—the "window" that has prompted the name of the Tower. Once on the "sill" it is an easy matter to scramble through to a wide space, which might be the floor of a room. It is not necessary to climb the corner up to the "window," however,

for it can be circumvented by keeping round to the right, and the hole reached on the inner side, when it frames a magnificent view outward to the corrie with Sgurr nan Gobhar opposite.

An almost horizontal rock-ridge is then soon attained, at the upper end of which rises the vertical wall of a rock-tower. This can be climbed to the cairn on its summit, whence the little col beyond can easily be gained. An alternative way of reaching the col is to skirt under the tower, through a small cave and into the gully, where easy screes lead upward to it.

For 60 feet above this the rocks are perpendicular: a term that, according to Mr. Clinton Dent, "in mountaineering literature signifies anything from difficult to impossible." Here it has another signification, for "perpendicular" in this case means quite easy. The rock is full of "pockets" like those encountered lower down; the climber hangs on to the vertical wall and experiences all the delightful exhilaration of great peril, whilst actually in perfect safety as long as he retains his grip. It is with a feeling of keen disappointment that he sprawls out at the top and finds that the angle of the crags above is greatly diminished. This 60 feet of climbing may be compared to a very fine liqueur, and, like the old farmer at his landlord's dinner, where curaçoa was provided in the usual small glasses, the climber sighs for "some of it in a mug"!

Two hundred feet of rock still remain, but as each foot is climbed the buttress steadily deteriorates, and finally breaks up into fine scree on the crest of Sron Dearg.

Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh.—Its dome-like appearance, and the fact that it occupies a position about mid-way along the main ridge, prompted Mr. W. Douglas to call Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh "the great central dome of the Coolin."

This happy phrase contains all that is necessary to define the locality of this grand peak. To say that it is situated between Sgurr a'Mhadaidh and Sgurr na Banachdich would be almost as superfluous as to describe Snowdon as lying between Lliwedd and Crib y Ddysgl. Wherefore we can, without further preliminary, get on with our rock-climbing.

By far the finest climb yet done on Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh is that of the Eastern or Coruisk Face, first made by Dr. Collie and Mr. Howell in September 1896. A note in the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*,[1] after giving a short description of the salient features of the climb, goes on to say that "it affords between 2500 and 3000 feet of climbing on first-rate bare rocks": surely the longest rock-climb in the British Isles.

Although under ordinary fine-weather conditions not a difficult course, I shall always remember it with respect, and look back to the day upon which I first made its acquaintance as one of the most memorable I have spent on the mountains.

We had been at Sligachan for a fortnight and were feeling strong after much hard going, when a party who had just done the climb tramped into the hotel late one night, loud in praise of their day's sport. "The finest bit of mountaineering

[1] Vol. iv. p. 203.

l South Peak of Sgurr a' Creadalath.
m Sgurr a' Mhaoraich (Central Peak).
n Sgurr a' Mhaoraich (North Peak).
o Pass between Sgurr a' Mhaoraich and Sgurr na Mhacaidh.

E COOLIN AROUND LOCH CORUISK

LOCH CORUISK AND THE COOLIN.

in Skye," they called it, and went on to say that it would be impossible for any one to do it without previous knowledge of the locality, except on a clear day.

We were somewhat disappointed to hear that it was "quite easy," so when the next morning broke cloudy and wet we decided to try the climb, and let it obtain what assistance it could from the inclement weather. I could only induce one of my party to accompany me, and we set off down Glen Sligachan in the rain, sped by the pity and good wishes of the stay-at-homes.

By the time we reached the Bloody Stone we were drenched to the skin, and this, with the sight of the clouds low down on Druim nan Ramh, very much weakened our resolution.

However, we could not in decency return so soon, so we breasted the steep slope to the top of the ridge, where we went somewhat astray in trying to descend to Coruisk.

A short trot down a grass slope brought us to the edge of a perpendicular cliff, along the top of which we walked in an endeavour to find a downward way. A scree shoot was soon struck, down which we "sailed" in great style, until it led between two walls of rock, and soon after plunged sheer over the top of a pitch. We had evidently got into a gully, and decided to try to force a way down it.

The rope was put on; my companion disappeared over the edge, and climbed slowly downward for about 30 feet.

"What's it like?" I queried, when my turn came.

"Oh, it's all right, but there's another below," came back the reply.

The way lay down a groove on the right of the pitch, which was streaming with water. I descended as quickly as possible, and soon found myself on a small scree platform above a vertical chimney. A glance over its crest disclosed, about 30 feet straight below, another scree patch. After lowering my friend I found a good belay, and swung downward on a doubled rope which "ran" splendidly. The water in the chimney was in great volume, and to have climbed down unaided would then have been impossible.

After pulling down the free end of the rope, very much the same performance was repeated three times, and then, having descended five good pitches, we got on to a steep slab which brought us to the mouth of the gully, and below the clouds.

I have always intended trying the ascent of this gully in dry weather, but the opportunity has never occurred. It ought to make a good climb; one which has not yet been done.

Straight beneath us was Coruisk; across to the right we discerned several streams brawling out of Corrie Uaigneis; on all sides the flanks of the peaks were hidden in mist above a height of about 800 feet. The rain came down in torrents, and a strong sou'-wester drove it along in sheets that pattered down viciously on the slab above us. Whilst coiling up the rope, I had quite resolved to turn down Coruisk, and back home over Druim Hain, but, on looking round for my companion, I saw him 200

yards away, heading for the foot of Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh like—

"One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break."

So I forthwith decided to go on until he cried, "Enough!"

A moment later a rift blew across the breast of Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh, and disclosed its long overlapping slabs streaming with water. In Cumberland the word "Greta" signifies flowing water, and a philologist friend tells me that there can be little doubt that Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh should be translated "the Peak of Flowing Water." It is certainly a most descriptive and appropriate name.

We soon traversed the intervening mile or so of broken ground to the stream, where we ate what was left of our lunch. The waterfalls of the gully had soddened much of it and rendered the rest unpalatable. Hard work was before us, however, and food was essential, so we simulated a relish we did not possess.

I remembered reading in the account of Dr. Collie's climb that he kept up the stream that came down to the south of Coire an Uaigneis. Unfortunately there were now six or seven quite respectable streams, and I think we must have taken the wrong one. All went well for about 200 feet, when we got into the mist again, and the rocks down which our stream poured became unclimbable.

A ledge was followed round to the right and another stream crossed, after which some steep

slabs, dipping outward in most unpleasant fashion, took us upward after much difficulty to a scree slope. "Open confession may be good for the soul," but as we faced each other on the breast of Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh that day our "open confession" was that our bodies were very nearly lost. Of one thing only we felt sure, and that was that we were greatly to the right of the route.

We therefore traversed across the screes until a vertical wall of rock, receding upward into the mist for an unknown height, was reached. What should we do next? we inquired of each other. It was now seven o'clock. A retreat to Coruisk would no doubt have been the right course to take, but those lower water-washed slabs might prove too much for us; our knowledge of the topography of Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh was at that time almost as hazy as our surroundings.

It was ultimately decided to follow the rock wall downward, until we could get across it. After about 50 feet it became less steep, and we were shortly able to traverse over to its crest. And here our troubles were greatly lightened, for the welcome sight of boot-nail scratches suggested that we must be on the upper part of the ridge. I hurried across for a few feet and our suspicion became a certainty, for the rocks plunged steeply over. I returned to my companion and then we struck upward along the crest of the ridge, which was sufficiently easy to permit of our both moving simultaneously. Occasionally the cheering scratches

of boot-nails were discernible on the rocks, but before long we missed them, and ultimately, after some very difficult climbing, were stopped by a steep overhanging nose of rock, down which the water poured on to my head.

To get higher was impossible, and from where I stood no alternative route was evident. I was just assimilating this unpleasant fact when a shout came up from my friend that a ledge ran round at his level to the left. I hurried down, and we followed this around in a slightly upward direction for about 50 feet until it ceased over a vertical cliff, the foot of which the mist prevented us from seeing. A shallow groove promised an upward passage to what, from below, looked like a higher ledge. My companion paid out the rope whilst I worked up the groove. Water came pouring down it, and this, combined with the fact that all the holds dipped slightly outward, rendered the passage very unpleasant, and more than a little difficult. The ledge above proved useless for anchoring purposes, so I went on for another 40 feet to a point where it looked possible to get back again to the crest of the ridge.

Here we joined forces and then traversed across to the right, where we again came upon boot-nail scratches. Above this the going was easy for 100 yards or so, until suddenly a blast of wind swept over the shoulder and across our ridge with a force that nearly dislodged us. We hung on to the holds for all we were worth, and then, when a lull came, scrambled down to the sheltered side, thence hustling upward

as fast as we could travel, arriving before long on the top of the south peak of the mountain.

We cowered under a ledge and disposed of our remaining food, noticing the while that a strange darkness was quickly coming on. We thought it must be an unusually black cloud approaching, but when I pulled out my watch and found that it was 9.15, it dawned on us that it was nearly night. And between us and Sligachan were three hours of hard going, even in fine weather, and ours was very much the reverse.

The wind tore and shrieked along the ridge above our heads, carrying the rain with it in great gouts that smacked the rocks and rebounded in spindrift, which was hurried away in the blast; and all around was a dense mist which even the fierce gale could not rend aside. It is such moments that bring home to one the insignificance of a human being when the forces of nature are let loose.

And yet, in spite of our unenviable position, we both enjoyed it—

> "There was freshness in the mountain air,
> And life that sleepy ease could never hope to share."

We both felt to the full what it was to be not only alive, but "instinct with the joy of the fray." Fortunately we were both "in the pink of condition"; with an exhausted companion either of us would have been in most serious plight.

Hurriedly we coiled up half the rope, keeping the rest tied on, for even the ridge of

Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh was not a safe place on which to be unroped that night. One moment in perfect shelter; the next the gale had got us and buffeted us along the ridge and over the north peak to An Dorus. The wind tore through the gap in terrific fashion; it was impossible to hear each other's shouts; we moved across between the lulls, and arrived breathless on the far side. What a contrast from the last time I had crossed An Dorus! Then the sky was cloudless, the rocks so hot we could scarcely handle them; we had ample time, and an hour had been idled away in sweet content and smoke.

A few minutes later we got to the col between Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh and Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.[1] At that time I had not been into Coire a'Ghreadaidh. It was not an occasion for experiments, so we kept along the sharp ridge and over the south-west peak of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh. Strangely enough the wind troubled us but very little here, and ere long we were down in the gap on the north. It was now nearly dark, and the descent of the gully leading to Sgurr Thuilm wasted us a lot of time. However, after two or three futile attempts, we attained the ridge of Thuilm below the rocks, and stumbled down into Corrie Tairneilear where, after being enveloped for about six hours, we got out of the clouds.

Confidently we stepped downwards; we were just discussing how long it would take us to

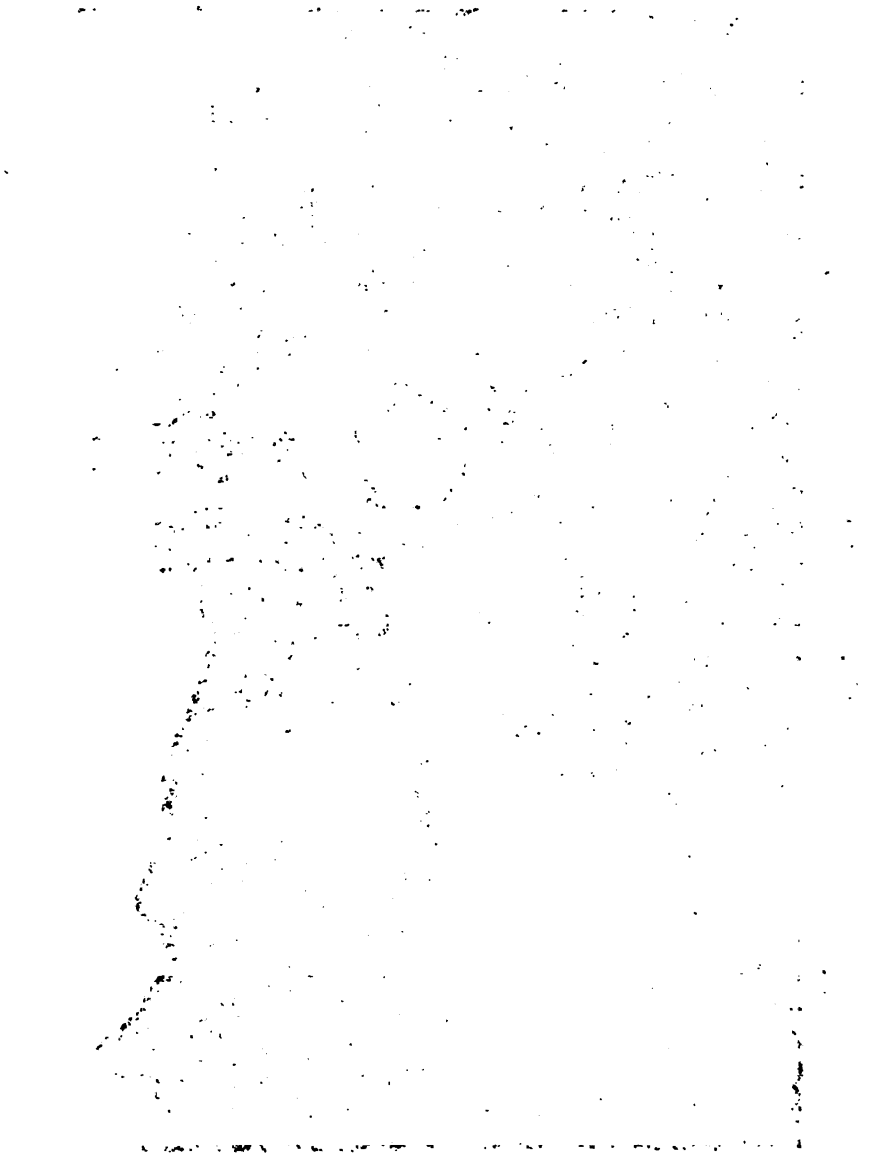
[1] This is marked "An Dorus" on the map, but An Dorus really occurs a few yards up the ridge of Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh.

reach the inn and generally feeling "out of the wood," when my companion gave a yell, and the concentrated darkness which evidenced his whereabouts, disappeared. The rope ran out with a jerk. In a moment it tightened round my waist and dragged me forward. Only for a yard or two, however; then it slackened again, and I was looking into blackness over the edge of a cliff. My friend had stepped right over it!

My shout of inquiry was unanswered for a moment, a dreadful moment during which unpleasant thoughts rushed through my mind, and then came a faint answer from below. Further queries shortly elicited the fact that nothing was broken, that he was only "winded" by the "bump," and that he was "on a ledge with nothing below." A few lusty hauls on the rope brought him to my level, and, after a hasty overhaul and congratulations, we set off again, this time more soberly.

The descent into Corrie na Creiche seemed chiefly to lie down a brawling torrent with a rocky bed. Every now and then my friend would slip over a steep place, and sit contentedly down until I landed on the top of him. These periods chiefly alternated between involuntary descents into wet bog and hurried consultations as to our whereabouts.

But time ends all things. An hour later we had waded the burn, and struck the path over Bealach a'Mhaim. For the rest, the inn was reached about two o'clock; all was in darkness, but I shouldered my friend on to the top of the porch, off which lay his bedroom, and he



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SGURR NA BANACHDICH AND SGURR A'GHREADAIDH,
FROM SGURR DEARG.

soon had the front door open. We laid hands on what food we could find, and then, to bed. From all of which the intelligent reader will doubtless infer three things—that the south-east ridge of Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh should not be tackled for the first time in wet weather; that its ascent from Sligachan involves a very long day, and that climbers, though not strictly "wayfaring" men, may sometimes be foolish.

Other Climbs on Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh.—Little climbing has been done on the Coire a'Ghreadaidh side of the peak, a fact which is probably accounted for by its remoteness from Sligachan and Glen Brittle. Several short climbs are still to be done hereabouts, but it is probable that when, in August 1898, Messrs. W. W. King, G. B. Gibbs, and Dobson traversed the pinnacled ridge[1] dividing Coire a'Ghreadaidh into two, they "bagged" the best scramble on this side of the mountain. The ridge is a veritable knife-edge in places and takes one into some fine situations, but the climbing is not difficult.

In the corner formed by the junction of this ridge with the main peak, and facing north, is a narrow gully, about 300 feet in height, but "it offers no difficulty to rock-climbers."

The same may be said of the long, prominent gully in the northern section of the corrie. The most eulogistic account of it says that "leading up it without dislodging loose stones gives a little interest": surely but a meagre recommendation in the Coolin!

[1] Its sharp extremity is now known as Sgurr an Eadar da Choire.

The early history of Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh is somewhat mysterious, if indeed it possesses one. The earliest ascent I have been able to trace was that by Mr. W. Newton Tribe in 1870.

In company with John Mackenzie he went into Coire a'Ghreadaidh, where they encountered a shepherd who was positive, not only that the Sgurr had not been climbed, but that it never would be! They passed him again on the way down, but, not wishing to tax his credulity too far, refrained from mentioning their exploit.

Probably it was the same man whom the late Professor Heddle met the following year, when he made his ascent, and, on the assurance of the shepherd, was rendered happy by the assumption that he had climbed a virgin peak.

CHAPTER X

SGURR DEARG AND THE "INACCESSIBLE" PINNACLE

SGURR DEARG was for long considered the highest mountain in Skye, a distinction which at one time or another has befallen nearly all the higher peaks of the Coolin. In the case of some of the others this was rather difficult to understand, unless the enthusiasm of those who first climbed them led them to imagine that their own particular peak was the highest; just as those who have made a quite mediocre "first ascent" are sometimes inclined to say that their achievement represents "the high-water mark of what is humanly possible." The "most difficult first ascent" and the "highest peak of the Coolin" are certainly akin in that both have many times proved to be transferable titles.

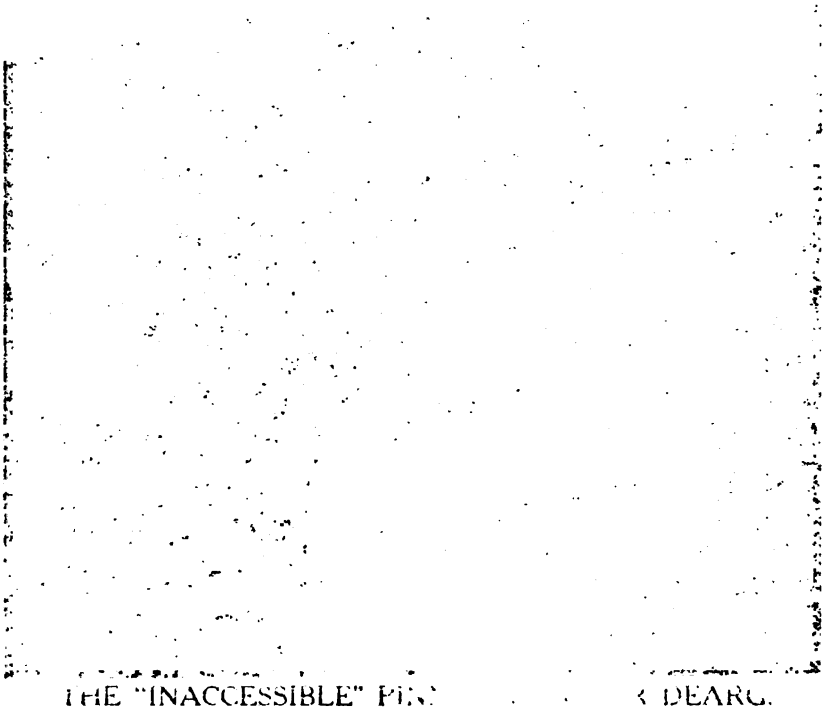
However, there was a decent excuse for thinking Sgurr Dearg the highest because, until quite recent times, nobody had succeeded in reaching its highest point—the "Inaccessible Peak" (so called on the old Admiralty Chart) or Old Man of Skye. It is, by the way, quite as unlikely that the naming of the pinnacle has anything to do with an elderly gentleman as that Coniston Old Man had anything to do with Ruskin. Both names are probably a corruption of the Celtic,

Alt Maen (high rock). And in the case of Sgurr Dearg the name is well deserved, for it is the second highest rock in Skye, Sgurr Alasdair alone surpassing it.

The "Inaccessible" Pinnacle forms a prominent object in the landscape of the Coolin, and looks very odd perched upon the rounded crest of Sgurr Dearg. It has been compared to various prosaic things, from a "comb stuck in the middle of a hair-brush" to a "wild beast's horn," and at a distance these comparisons may be fairly apt. But at close quarters the pinnacle is a very fine object, and not for a moment to be likened to any small domestic article. Rather may it be taken as a type of the "survival of the fittest," for it has withstood the storms, frost, and sun of ages past, and towers up into the sky above the adjacent rock in much the same way as a strong personality dominates its weaker or more plastic fellows. It is a hard mass of gabbro which at one time was bedded between two "dykes" of basalt and diabase. These dykes have been weathered away by the action of the elements, and left standing this unique pinnacle.

It is quite unlike any of the other rock-pillars of the British Isles in that it is actually the top of a mountain, the others, Napes Needle, Pillar Rock, and so on, being only lower spurs of their various peaks.

The summit ridge of Sgurr Dearg dips at a moderate angle downward to the east, towards Coruisk. This slope is a wide, weather-worn slab, upon which rest many loose stones and



THE "INACCESSIBLE" PE[illegible] DEARG.

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THE "INACCESSIBLE" PINNACLE, SGURR DEARG.

patches of scree. In the centre of it stands the "Old Man of Skye." The lowest extremity of the "Inaccessible" Pinnacle rises some 200 feet below the crest of this slab, and the rock gains in height until its top overlooks the top of the slab by some 20 or 25 feet.

The earliest literary notice of it I have been able to discover is in "Two Months in the Highlands," where Mr. C. R. Weld calls to it the attention of his fellow-members of the Alpine Club.[1]

Fifteen years later came Sheriff Nicolson. That was in the days when virgin peaks were still to be wooed and won in the Coolin, and, although he was on the crest of Sgurr Dearg, he made no attempt to climb it, but passed down into Corrie Lagan, thence making the first ascent of Sgurr Alasdair.

He says of the pinnacle that "it might be possible with ropes and grappling irons to overcome it, but the achievement seems hardly worth the trouble." It was fortunate for its inaccessibility that he arrived at this conclusion without trying it. In the light of his other climbs in the Coolin there can be no doubt that the "Old Man" had a very narrow escape. Nevertheless, after this a good deal of interest was aroused locally, and two or three adventurous shepherds screwed up their courage and attempted its ascent.

It was not, however, until 1880 that it forfeited the right to its name. In that year Messrs. Charles and Lawrence Pilkington climbed it, and

[1] See p. 314 of the present volume.

the following year one of the discomfited shepherds, by dint of removing his shoes, succeeded in repeating their performance. But although no longer inaccessible the name clings to it; and perhaps it is well that it should. Climbers are popularly supposed to delight in scaling inaccessible places; they can here achieve their desire in comparative safety. The man who is fond of posing before his non-climbing friends can, upon his return home, hold forth in very truth about his ascent of an "inaccessible" peak.

The brothers Pilkington made their ascent by the eastern end[1] or ridge of the pinnacle and were somewhat troubled by loose rock. The arête is very narrow in places and at one point a portion of it had to be prised bodily away before safe holding could be gained. These conditions do not trouble the present-day climber; all the "rubble" has long since disappeared, and the evidences of former ascents are almost as plentiful as upon the famous Pillar of Scawfell. A "decade of gymnasts" can do much to exterminate loose rocks; each remaining foothold has been well tested and is indelibly scoured and scratched by iron-shod boots.

Messrs. Pilkington descended by the way they came. Six years later Messrs. A. H. Stocker and A. G. Parker (how reminiscent of North Wales those names are!) climbed the pinnacle by its short western end. These two climbs are now generally linked to form a traverse, the ascent of

[1] It should perhaps be mentioned that the so-called eastern ridge of the pinnacle faces a few points south of east and that the compass bearings of the other faces mentioned are only approximate.

the eastern and descent by the other side being the favourite method of crossing. Although at one place the western end is more difficult than any part of the other route, the latter gives a much longer and more varied climb.

The Eastern Ascent — Inaccessible Pinnacle.—To reach the start of this it is necessary to descend the screes from the summit ridge on the south side of the pinnacle. In passing downward it will be noticed that its almost perpendicular wall is cleft from bottom to top by a thin crack. This has been climbed and is the "new route" to the top, making four distinctive methods of reaching that eminence. To this we will revert later.

The climb up the eastern edge starts a few feet to the left of the lower extremity of the pinnacle, and leads upward for about 40 feet, over easy climbing, by way of a semi-detached mass of rock. This soon becomes somewhat holdless, and it is then advisable to cross to the right to the exposed main ridge. The first two or three steps are very steep, but the holds are firm and satisfactory. A little higher the ridge narrows very considerably and the view down each side is almost sheer, that towards Coruisk being particularly impressive. The eye looks over the edge and finds its first resting-place fully 2000 feet below. It is a true arête and fulfils the requirement of the text-books—"a narrow ridge leading to a summit." Dr. J. J. Hornby, of Eton memory, once told me a delightful definition he had heard of an arête—"a razor-like edge with an overhanging and infinite drop on one

side, and a drop longer and steeper on the other!"

Perhaps the man who evolved this had his imagination stimulated by this ridge of the "Inaccessible" Pinnacle. It will at all events seem a fitting definition to the nervous novice who turns giddily away from the drop on the Corrie Lagan side to one much steeper and of greater depth towards Coruisk.

The fanciful description of a party that got so far on a snowy winter's day, with a high wind blowing, gives a good idea of the kind of thoughts such a place may prompt. One of them writes of himself as "spread-eagled and clinging with every available portion of his anatomy to the ice-covered 'easy' ridge of the 'Inaccessible'—truly so to-day—while the level hail drove fiercely past, expecting every moment to see his legs raised in the air, his hobnailers crack together once or twice like the tails of a pennon and then, converted along with his three companions, like the crew of the *Hesperus*, into icicles, hurled away into Coruisk on the wings of the Arctic blast."[1]

But under normal conditions the narrowness and steepness of this part are its chief claims to distinction. It is not difficult nowadays; to stray far from the proper route is impossible, and before long the climber will find himself seated on a rough, almost horizontal slab where he can look down the thin cleft he noticed from below in passing to the eastern end of the pinnacle.

A short stretch of nearly level ridge then

[1] *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, vol. ix. p. 60.

brings him to the summit stone, beneath which, if the day be warm and time of no importance, he can sleep off the effects of his excitement. It is an ideal place in which to find oneself with an hour to spare; a pipe, and the feeling of pleasurable fatigue which comes to those in good health, can here be enjoyed in perfect bliss.

A certain well-known climber has said that however successfully happiness may elude pursuit, it can sometimes be surprised amongst the weird crags of the Aiguilles des Grandes Charmoz. On sunny days it also lurks amongst the topmost rocks of the "Inaccessible" Pinnacle.

The Western Route.—This is comparatively short. There is a Cumberland saying to the effect that "good stuff laps up in la'al bundles." It is a proverb generally used by small people when their more bulky friends become derogatory. The western end of the pinnacle might so retaliate upon the eastern: there is not much of it, but what there is is good. It concentrates into the small space of about 40 feet what the other route distributes over about three times that height.

The ascent starts from the small col formed by the western base of the pinnacle and the mountain. The initial step is a steep pull up for a few feet, until, as the rock becomes vertical, one is forced away to the left on to a ledge of sloping, smooth rock. This is an intrusion of hard basalt of the kind that often provides the crux of the Coolin climbs. It inclines slightly to one's disadvantage, and is so hard that climbing nails do not grip well unless the whole flat of the foot

be placed upon it. This place affords a comparatively simple instance of how important it is in rock-climbing not to rely too much on the outside nails of the boots, but to obtain the maximum of friction by allowing the ankle to bend until the sole of the boot is flat on the foothold. This is one of the most important lessons the novice has to learn; simple as it may seem in theory, the knack of using sloping holds to the best advantage in this way needs the confidence that is only to be gained by assiduous practice. The difference between the expert and the duffer—and duffers may be of many years' standing—often consists almost entirely in the proper mastery of this apparently trivial detail. Its effectiveness can be well tested on this ledge of the "Inaccessible" Pinnacle. The foot slips off when only the edge of the boot is used; when it is stood upon squarely, it affords just sufficient friction to support the weight without slipping.

The rock immediately above it is vertical to the height of one's chest, where it slopes back to a rough "mantel-shelf" about a yard wide. This is too sloping to give much handhold, but by using the left foot as suggested above, while the flat of the hands are pressed on the "mantel," an extra 3 feet of height are gained, and the hand can then be thrust behind a semi-detached block.

This is quite firm; by using its rough edges, it is then a simple matter to attain a standing position on the mantel, when the top of the block can be reached. It forms a good belay around which to pass the rope, and is often used to safeguard the last man down when traversing the

pinnacle. After clambering to its top, an easy step upward lands one on a rough slab whence the mossy recess under the summit is soon reached.

An alternative route from the mantel is to traverse along it to the left until a prominent crack is gained. It is somewhat awkward to enter, but when once this is done the holds are good and a pleasant struggle soon takes one to the top. Its first ascent is popularly ascribed to Professor Collie, but he tells me that this is a mistake; perhaps a somewhat natural one when it is borne in mind how many of the first ascents in the Coolin have fallen to him.

Mr. Harold Raeburn has succeeded in reaching the foot of this crack from directly beneath, thus demonstrating the possibility of climbing the pinnacle on its north side. Alas! poor pinnacle, your old acquaintance Sheriff Nicolson thought you impregnable save with grappling irons, and now rock-climbers scramble up your rough sides from east, west, north, and south! Ah well, they love you all the better for it, because they know that "the achievement *is* worth the trouble!"

The climb up the west side was for long considered somewhat of a feat. I well remember John Mackenzie's remark in 1895 when we told him we had climbed to the top by this route.

"What," said he, "by the short side? But it is impossible!"

"Excuse me," said my companion, "but I said we had climbed it!"

"Yes, sir," returned John, "I don't doubt

your word, only I know it's impossible; I've been up it ma'sel!"

As we came to know him better we found that no disbelief was implied, but that his English, which, by the way, is quite good nowadays, led him to construe extremely difficult and impossible as one and the same thing.

The Southern Route.—As long since as 1895 the crack in the south wall of the pinnacle had suggested itself to me as a means of making a new route to its summit ridge.

One hot day in May of that year three overdone climbers toiled wearily up Sron Dearg—the long ridge stretching downward to Glen Brittle—with a blazing sun beating mercilessly upon them, causing a fervent wish for the burns in their normal state of wetness.

Away across the glen and shimmering through the hot haze, the waters of Loch Brittle seemed to add to their torment, and it was with a sigh of great relief that they at length relaxed their already inert joints and sank down on the slabs of the summit ridge. But they were not quite exhausted, as was evidenced by the alacrity with which they jumped to their feet again: the top of the mountain was almost like a huge frying-pan. It was certainly too hot to sit upon without a coat or other non-conductor of heat. The rocks of the southern side of the pinnacle were in a similar state and rendered all idea of an ascent, except by the shady northern side, quite out of the question. They took some photographs and made a mental note of the Southern Crack, but returned to Glen Brittle without even so much as touching it.

Four years later a short note upon it appeared in a mountaineering journal. One of its contributors climbed the crack throughout, but with a rope let down from above. The account goes on to say that although he received no assistance, the climber "expressed a decided opinion that the ascent should not be repeated without the moral support of the rope from above, as a slip would be most serious." I know not whether it was the above note or the ferocious appearance of the crack which led thereafter to its careful avoidance by climbers. However this may be, the fact remains that no record exists of any subsequent attempt upon it until June 1906, when Mr. H. Harland led two friends—Mr. A. H. Binns and myself—straight up it, without being roped from above.

We had spent the previous night in our sleeping bags by the shore of Loch Lagan. It had come to the last day of our stay, and we had attained that degree of physical fitness that causes one to wish for a climb more than ordinarily difficult.

My companions were thirsting for something wherewith to commemorate their holiday, and plaintively asked me if there was nothing really stiff they could try. I pointed to a certain overhanging cliff on Sgumain, but said nothing about the crack on the "Inaccessible" until I should have once more inspected it at close quarters. They decided that the Sgumain cliff offered insufficient inducement, and resigned themselves to the traverse of the "Inaccessible" Pinnacle.

We accordingly scrambled out of our "bags," had breakfast, and, after a swim in the loch, made

for the open gully in the face of Sgurr Dearg. This led us gently upward by way of easy scrambling until we were almost on a level with the lowest point of the eastern end of the pinnacle. We then traversed across the screes towards it. My friends climbed up the eastern arête, while I professed a desire to join them on the summit by way of the short western end. I thus had a good opportunity, in passing, of a thorough survey of the crack without their knowledge.

As seen from my position on the screes at its foot, it certainly looked very formidable and would apparently necessitate a clear run out by the leader of more than 100 feet. At a height of about 30 feet up it was crossed by a "dyke" of basalt which choked it up entirely, breaking its continuity. It would be necessary to climb over this, and the position in so doing would be much exposed. On the other hand, and except at this point, the crack was deeply cut and a trial of the lower 20 feet proved it to be much easier than it looked. Also there was a likelihood that the "dyke" would dip in our favour and provide good holds, because the similar dyke on the north side, on the ordinary way up the pinnacle, inclines slightly outward.

However, in face of the warning contained in the above-mentioned journal, it was desirable to inspect the crack from above in the first place, so I hurried around to the western end and joined my companions on the summit of the pinnacle.

Harland's delight when he heard of the likelihood of a "new route" was great, and he begged

me to show him where it was. We therefore went along the ridge to its top, where I insisted, much against his wish, upon his descending a short distance on the rope. He disappeared over the edge, to the accompaniment of much grumbling and sundry remarks that it was not playing the game. When he had been gone a few minutes he shouted back in answer to our questions, "It's quite all right; I'm not going any further." He then rejoined us, and we scrambled around to the foot of the crack. Here I explained to them that my special function was that of photographer, so I took up a position a short distance away on the scree and waited for the opportunity when developments should reach the most artistic stage; in other words, when the leader should attain the position of maximum discomfort.

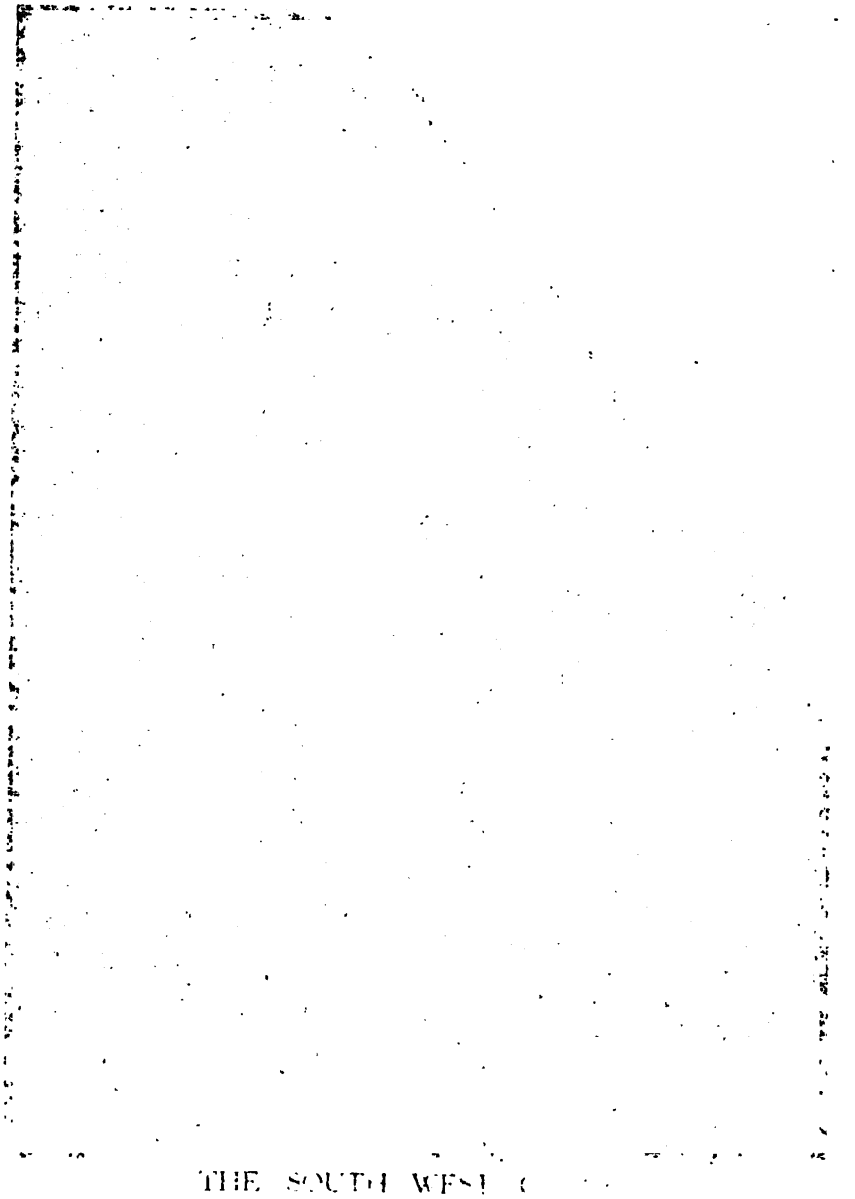
For some time he worked steadily upwards, but the crack was so deep that the only indication I had of his whereabouts was a puff now and then of tobacco-smoke. He soon reached the under side of the "dyke," and then I caught sight of the top of his head. Next a hand was warily thrust outside in quest of a hold. This was soon withdrawn, and I heard him knocking the ashes from his pipe before proceeding. He was evidently impressed by the difficulty of the next step. Again the hand appeared and a hold was found almost at once. After a warning to Binns to let his rope run freely, he swung out on his hands for a moment, almost directly afterwards securing a foothold on the dyke. To me the climbing was most exciting for every move

was evident, but at a distance the holds which rendered the movements possible were quite invisible. He looked for all the world like a fly plastered on a huge wall; he appeared to retain his position by some innate power of adhesion.

He stopped for a good while with his feet on the "dyke" and shouted down to us that the next step appeared difficult. There are plenty of holds, but they are somewhat awkwardly placed. It is really a comparatively simple matter to climb this part, but it is most important to start it rightly because the task of coming back when at such a height, and with such small holds to which to return, would be somewhat disconcerting. This is the most difficult part. If it were at a height of about 6 feet from the ground it would be quite easy; an altitude of 30 feet makes it most distinctly otherwise. A small foothold on the right wall is the key to the situation and, after testing this well and determining as far as possible the necessary distribution of the balance a foot or two higher, Harland moved slowly upward and soon gained the wider part of the crack, where he again disappeared from my sight.

A most effective photograph would have been secured had I taken him as he pulled up on to the "dyke," but so engrossed was my attention in watching his movements that I missed the opportunity, so exposed a plate when he was a step higher.[1] The crack now continues uninterrupted

[1] The result is opposite. It will be noticed in this that the "dyke" runs across the crack about 4 feet below the upper figure. On a level



THE SOUTH WEST
"INACCESSIBLE" PIN

was evident, but at a distance the holds which limited the movements possible were quite visible. He looked for all the world like a fly glued on to a huge wall; he appeared to cause his ascension by some innate power of adhesion.

He remained for a good while with his feet on the ledge and shouted down to us that the next step was difficult. There are plenty of holds, but they are somewhat awkwardly placed. It is always a comparatively simple matter to climb up a rock, but it is most important to start it the task of coming back when and with such small holds would be somewhat disconthe most difficult part. If it of about 6 feet from the ground easy; an altitude of 30 feet distinctly otherwise. A small footright wall is the key to the situaafter testing this well and determining possible the necessary distribution of the a foot or two higher, Harland moved upward and soon gained the wider part crack, where he again disappeared from sight.

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THE SOUTH WEST CRACK,
"INACCESSIBLE" PINNACLE.

to the skyline and is for the most part deeply cut, containing excellent holds. The upper part is very steep, but much assistance can be obtained by resting the back against the left wall.

I know of no climb which is so fine from a spectacular point of view. The part of the body that is in space can be well seen most of the way up, whilst the limbs which hold it in place are out of sight in the crack. It is one of those places where the onlooker does not "see most of the game." But he experiences an undue share of the excitement.

If some of those people who nightly visit the various music-halls (and undergo thrills while their impecunious or adventurous fellow-beings risk their lives for their delectation) could be transported to watch an ascent of this crack, I feel sure that a "new sensation" would be theirs. Fortunately, however, such a thing is not possible.

When our leader had climbed to within 20 feet of the top, his rope (an 80-foot one) was all out, so Binns had to unrope to allow him to finish. Before long, he was seated on a wide ledge, just below the skyline, and waiting in readiness for the second man. Binns then climbed upward for about 20 feet until he reached the rope, to which he attached himself. He then proceeded to demonstrate what a vast difference the knowledge of a rope held from above makes

with his head the crack is wide enough to accommodate the whole body. It ought to be said that the photograph is taken showing the angle of the climb, but it does not look right into the crack. To have done this the camera would have needed to be so much lower down the scree that the crack would have become very much foreshortened. The skyline of the photograph is formed by the eastern edge of the pinnacle.

to one's climbing. He clambered upward as fast as his physical condition would allow, shouting across to me every now and then words indicative of his enjoyment, and soon joined Harland on his ledge.

The rope was then lowered again, and I imitated his example.

This long stretch of crack reaches a degree of excellence which approximates very nearly to the superlative. The rock is splendidly firm and rough; the chock-stones in the crack appear to be quite secure; the situation is irreproachable, and at no part is the climbing too severe, while on the other hand none of it is so easy as to be uninteresting. Although there is no room for the second man to join the leader at any point, there are several places where one can stand in comfort, at perfect rest for any length of time. It is to be feared that the long run out for the leader will debar most climbers from making the ascent, and this makes it impossible for me to say to all parties, "This is a safe climb; go and climb it!" But to those leaders who have safely negotiated Kern Knotts Crack on Great Gable, Scawfell Pinnacle from the second pitch in Deep Ghyll, the Water-pipe Gully of Corrie na Creiche, and other courses of like difficulty, this "inaccessible" crack can be safely recommended. And to those whose powers do not attain to these heights, I would say, "Take a 100-foot rope; ask a companion to hold you from above, and enjoy in perfect safety a stretch of rock-climbing that is altogether delightful, and in many ways unique." It should be unnecessary for me to add that warm, dry

rocks are essential factors in one's enjoyment: it is not a wet-weather climb.

The four different routes up the pinnacle may be taken as typical of the increasing difficulty in rock-climbs, since it was first climbed in 1880. Not that present-day climbers are better than those of that date—far from it indeed; but the exhaustion of the more obvious, easy ridges and gullies has necessarily heightened the standard of difficulty.

It is almost impossible to leave the "Inaccessible" Pinnacle without some reference to Sgurr Alasdair. This magnificent peak certainly looks its best from here, and climbers will carry away among their impressions of a unique mountain summit remembrances of the finest peak in the Coolin. Except in the matter of size it would be hard to surpass in any mountain region. It may not be quite so showy or symmetrical as some others, but it is buttressed up grandly on both sides, as seen from Sgurr Dearg, by Sgurr Tearlach and Sgurr Sgumain, while its almost sheer north face, bounded by the black funnel of the Great Stone Shoot, lends it dignity and grandeur quite unsurpassable in a mountain on the same scale.

The shape of the final cone is most beautiful. It was the peak which most impressed Sheriff Nicolson, whose name it bears, and few there be since his time who have seen it from Sgurr Dearg but will agree that one of the greatest attractions of the "Inaccessible" Pinnacle is the view it affords across Corrie Lagan of the highest Coolin.

CHAPTER XI

SGURR MHIC CHOINNICH

FINELY situated at the head of Corrie Lagan, with Sgurr Tearlach and lordly Sgurr Alasdair on the south, and Sgurr Dearg to its north, stands the peak of Mackenzie; or, to be more particular, of John the guide of that ilk.

It is separated from the spur of Sgurr Dearg, called An Stac, by Bealach Corrie Lagan whence its long ridge rises, culminating in a sharp peak. Almost immediately the highest point is attained, the ridge plunges sheer over for about 100 feet to the line of demarcation between Sgurr Mhic Choinnich and Sgurr Tearlach. The general effect of this long ridge and its sheer termination, a prominent landmark in the Coolin, is somewhat grotesque. It suggests an armour-clad horse of ancient times. Why it should convey this impression it would be difficult to say, but several people who have seen it for the first time from the Corrie Lagan side have had the same weird animal suggested. It is unfortunate for any peak to bear a resemblance to a conventional object. Once the likeness has been noticed it is always there, and instead of having one's imagination stirred by the grandeur of its form, one sees constantly that unhappy prototype.

Seen from certain points, however, Sgurr Mhic

Choinnich shows up in its true aspect as a fine rocky summit. At close quarters, also, the imaginative are not troubled by its general appearance. Its long, mural precipice, hemming in the head of Corrie Lagan, is on a large scale and has much to do with the savage impression conveyed by the upper corrie. But, while fine to look at, this wall of cliff is too shattered to afford satisfactory climbing, except at its extreme southern end, where a magnificent buttress, fully 1000 feet high, springs from the corrie and continues unbroken to the summit rocks.

The traverse along the skyline of Sgurr Mhic Choinnich from north to south calls into play a considerable amount of mountaineering ability; the steep drop to the south offers a problem far from easy of solution on a misty day.

It was one of the last peaks on the main ridge to capitulate to climbers, Messrs. C. Pilkington, H. Walker, and Heelis, with John Mackenzie, sharing the honour of its conquest. Their route lay along the narrow ridge from the north until the top was reached. Here they built a cairn, afterwards retracing their steps to the Bealach Coire Lagan.

Some few years later Mr. J. C. Hart, with John Mackenzie, succeeded in traversing the peak from north to south. Just before reaching the top they descended on the Corrie Lagan side for about 100 feet, and thence contoured around and under the steep summit rocks to the col below the vertical southern face. Their route is probably the one most commonly followed nowadays, though it permits of much variation in detail.

On the 8th August 1898 Mr. W. Wickham King, with two friends, climbed the peak *en face* from the south, by the steep cleft which is now known as King's Chimney. This starts about 70 feet above the col and affords one of the best stretches of climbing to be had on the main ridge.

The chimney is narrow at the start but widens towards the top, where it is blocked by an overhang. Just below this is a comfortable recess from which the leader can be safeguarded by the rope while he traverses out along the right wall, thus circumventing the impending upper rocks. A good platform above the difficulty can soon be attained, and the top of the peak is then but a few yards away.

The easier route from the col follows a wide ledge a few feet down on the Corrie Lagan face. This continues around the peak, presenting various minor difficulties *en route*, to a shallow gully on its far side, up which an easy scramble soon takes one to the summit ridge.

After making their ascent Mr. Pilkington's party, assuming the prerogative common to such favoured individuals (how favoured only we present-day climbers can know, who sigh in vain for virgin Coolin!) christened their peak. "We jokingly called the nameless peak at the head of the Corrie 'Pic Mackenzie' after our gillie, who went up with us, and we hear that it has since been known as Sgurr Mhic Choinnich, the Gaelic equivalent." Thus he describes the incident in his paper read before the Alpine Club shortly after. And one cannot but be glad that their joke was

taken seriously, for it seems very fitting that one of the Coolin should commemorate the name of their greatest guide. Perhaps I may be forgiven if I go further still and, in this section on the peak, say a few words about the man after whom it is called.

John Mackenzie's relation to the Coolin is a very close one. Not only has he been concerned in the first ascent of many of the most difficult of them, but his knowledge of their every ridge and cranny is unexcelled, and his love for them unsurpassed. Personally, my feeling with regard to guides to our home mountains has always been one of resentment, for not the least of their charms to me is that their recesses can be explored without professional assistance. But, although most of us will probably have our party complete before going to Skye, there will doubtless come a day, sooner or later, when we shall find ourselves without a companion, and shall be fortunate if John is then disengaged. He is very different from the ordinary Swiss guide of the present day. There is that about him, as there was about some of the earlier Swiss guides, which forbids one remember that he is paid for his services.

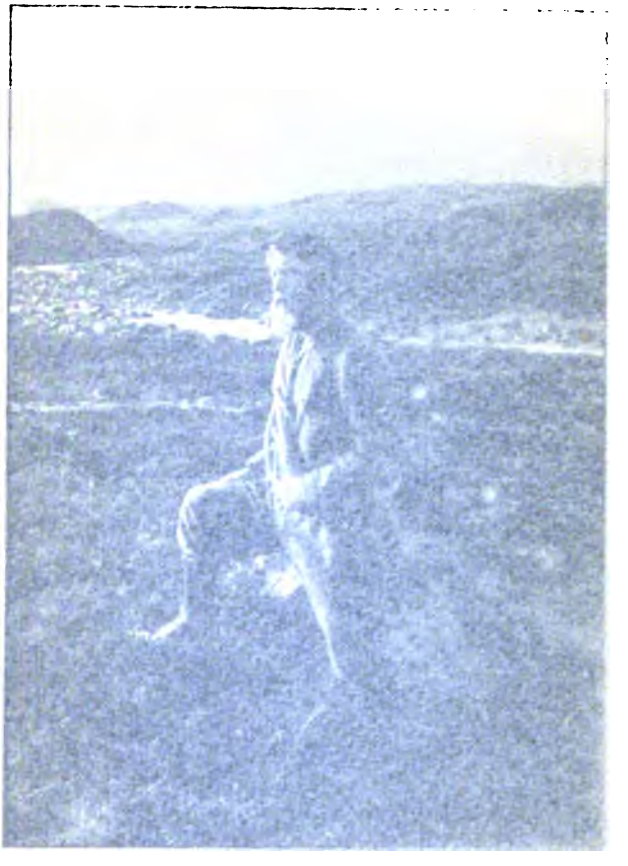
He is more a companion than a guide. When in his company one feels that his predominating qualities are his love for the mountains, his genial and kindly nature, his unremitting care, and a fine sturdy independence of spirit; the mere accident that Providence has not seen fit to endow him with worldly riches does not detract from these. The Coolin are to him an open book, every page of which he knows by heart. Their history is at

his finger-tips; it is a great delight to sit with him on the top of some grim tower and question him on the topography of the surrounding peaks. Add to his other qualities those of a good and careful rock-climber, and one cannot but endorse Mr. Pilkington's action in calling one of the main peaks of the Coolin by his name.

The West Buttress—Sgurr Mhic Choinnich.—As has already been suggested, this is the feature of Sgurr Mhic Choinnich which makes the strongest claims on the rock-climber. When camping on the shore of Loch Lagan in 1906 we often looked across the corrie at it, and were wont to fill in our evenings after the day's climbing by speculating upon the chances of finding a route straight up the nose of the buttress. Dusk was generally setting in before we were at liberty to squander time in idleness, and the June twilight did not make the proposed climb look its easiest.

In the light of a mid-day sun, which casts into relief certain roughnesses on its rounded surface, it looks much more accessible. Other plans always frustrated an attempt upon it at that time, however, and it was not until the autumn of the following year that four of us left Glen Brittle intent upon its closer inspection.

The day was typical of late October. For the first half-hour after leaving our quarters the sun shone so brightly that rain seemed but a remote contingency. And then, from a dark blot on the ocean horizon, a dull streak came at a tremendous pace across the face of the Atlantic, reaching us in the form of a heavy hail-shower,



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only a few minutes after we had first noted its appearance. We hurried to the leeward of a great boulder above Loch an Fhir-bhallaich, but were no sooner snugly sheltered than the sun reappeared, the storm scurried into the upper corrie and thence over the ridge of our peak, derisively flourishing its tails of light vapour as it vanished. The showers became more frequent as we gained the outlet to Loch Lagan, and here a halt was called until the rocks should blow clear of cloud and enable us to see our whereabouts.

An observant man, standing on the huge glaciated slab at the seaward end of the loch, will notice, almost in a straight line with the top of Sgurr Mhic Choinnich, at the point where the screes of the Great Stone Shoot abut upon the crags, two black caves. Immediately to the left of these is the lowest point of the buttress. This peeped out of the mist, and was the only indication of our climb vouchsafed to us for some time, until suddenly the clouds swirled upward and exposed the whole cirque of the corrie, except away up to our left where Sgurr Dearg sulked invisible in the driving storm.

After making the most of the temporary clearance to survey our route, we crossed the Great Stone Shoot fairly low down and made for the left-hand of the two caves. Water came down it in torrents, augmented by a heavy shower which had just then passed. About 50 yards away to the left we built a cairn of decent dimensions to mark the foot of our climb. For a short distance above this the going was very easy. Our cairn proved a bit premature, so we erected another on a

platform at the foot of the steep rocks, which is the proper beginning of the buttress. A nose of rock was attacked directly above the cairn, but, after climbing to its upper edge, my brother, who was leading, found the angle too steep and was forced away to the right for about 20 feet.

Here he obtained good anchorage, while I climbed to the top of the nose. I was now almost on my brother's level, and was preparing to step across to the right to a somewhat sloping hold, when along came a terrific storm of hail and wind. The hail instantly poured off the steep rock like a small avalanche, chilling my fingers and rendering the next move quite impossible.

As fast as I cleared a foothold, the half-thawed hail came rattling down from above and covered it. Had the rope been directly above me I might have pocketed my pride and used it, but it led away horizontally and was therefore useless. My position was most uncomfortable, and all my attention was needed to retain it. There was nothing to be done but lie out helplessly on the rocks until the storm abated or until such time as my benumbed fingers refused to cling to the holds. I remember looking apprehensively over my right shoulder to a certain lower spike of rock, which, I calculated, would act as a buffer as I swung across on the rope, and wondering if I should break anything as I struck. I also remember feeling exceedingly foolish.

Just when all sensation was leaving my fingers, the storm suddenly abated, and I was able to clear the hailstones from the foothold and step over to

the right. An easy traverse then took me across to the leader, where I was able to restore the circulation in my hands and feel thankful to be out of a very nasty place.

The others came up without trouble, while my brother climbed straight upward for about 40 feet to a broad ledge, where we soon joined him. The rocks were very cold and wet, hailstones lay in all the crevices, and it was with feelings of relief that we noticed the angle of the buttress ease off for a considerable distance ahead. Much climbing like that we had just done was scarcely justifiable under the existing conditions.

Cold, wet rocks are not of much consequence when a climb has been done before, and its difficulties are known to be within certain limits. But on new climbs, where the leader never knows but that he may have to retrace his steps on a very difficult section, to say nothing of his being caught in my predicament on the nose, the cold rocks are apt to numb his fingers too rapidly. These and other thoughts are apt to intrude when on the actual climb in bad weather; afterwards one is apt to look back and wonder why things were found so difficult, and why it could be possible for one to have been pleased because the climbing eased off a little. The actual thoughts on the climb are the true thoughts, however, and the difficulty of a climb as estimated on the spot is the true difficulty—a point to be borne in mind when discussing a graduated list of courses!

I well remember making a very difficult first ascent in Skye, and my companion's constant com-

ment all the way up it was—"This is the stiffest thing I've ever done." He emerged at the top of each pitch tremendously impressed by the leader's ability, and very thankful for the moral support of the rope. But on making comparisons during our walk home in the evening he startled me very considerably by exclaiming, after a short silence—"That 40-foot pitch was a bit troublesome, but I think the climb isn't as stiff as we thought it!" He was quite certain he had done several things much more difficult, and there and then proceeded to give me a list of them! The fallacy was due to his reasoning from a normal point of view, when a true estimate could only be arrived at under the existing abnormal circumstances; when the muscles were tired, the hands chilled, the footholds sloping outwards, and the remorseless laws of gravity ever pulling him backwards. In giving an estimate of a climb, one ought first of all to recall one's sensations on the spot. Something must be discounted for abnormal conditions, of course, but this only sparingly.

In other words, to return to our buttress, had the difficulty promised to be as great as that we had just overcome, we should have taken the first available corner to escape from our climb.

The next section looked much easier, however, and we made fairly quick progress over the next 200 or 300 feet. The gradient then became steeper and took us by way of good rocks, always interesting, but somewhat lacking in individuality, to a point about 150 feet below the top of the peak.

This part had looked very steep from below, and we had felt sure that we should be driven from the crest of the buttress into a gully which ran up to the left. We had reckoned without the wonderful rock of the Coolin, however, and though vertical the buttress now gave promise of success to a frontal attack. Directly above us it was deeply riven by a steep chimney. A broad slab led us up to its foot, where we forgathered and paid out the leader's rope over a good hitch. The chimney proved too steep and wet for him, and at a point about 10 feet up it a traverse along its right wall to a ledge at a higher point had to be effected. This was not difficult. From the ledge we were able to get a view of the upper continuation of the chimney. It looked very formidable. Water came over its crest in a thin trickle, which was soon caught and scattered in all directions by a strong wind which raged near the top of the mountain. The prospect was not very inviting, but, having come so far, we were reluctant to turn back without giving the chimney a trial. From our position, a scree-covered ledge gave access to its foot. Once there we were glad to find that a line of holds ran up its steep right wall to a bulging corner on the skyline. The position was most exposed, and the wind swept up past us in full force.

My brother climbed up to the corner without much difficulty, but when arrived there he stood out against the face of the rock in a state of inactivity. "Why don't you go on?" we shouted. He yelled back a reply, but what it was we could

not hear through the roar of the wind. Soon we saw his right foot move gingerly round the corner, to be quickly withdrawn and his former attitude regained. We were in fairly good shelter, and thought it must be the difficulty of the corner that was stopping him.

Shortly a lull came, and he quickly took advantage of it to step round out of our sight, just in time to escape a gust of wind which came roaring round the corner, striking the place he had just left like the crack of a whip. It was my turn. The rocks up to the corner were steep and wet, but the holds were good. Engrossed with the climbing, and moving as quickly as I could in order to keep warm, I came upon the corner suddenly. And then a curious thing happened. I felt as though some one was forcibly pushing me backwards with a huge snowball, which yelped and snapped like a savage dog. It was the cold blast striking the corner. I clung to my holds, waiting for a lull.

"Why don't you come on?" inquired my brother from above—a query which struck me as unkind. Those from below also got impatient; then suddenly the wind dropped, and I scurried round as fast as possible. The corner was not particularly easy, but the return of the icy blast was what most concerned me. A lusty pull on the rope rather hastened matters.

We were both blue with cold. I released my brother, and took in the next man's rope. He sailed up to the corner in great style; more, he came round it without hindrance, all impatient to hear the reason of our strange antics. The ex-

planation came when our last man appeared over the edge. Directly he came in sight he screwed up his eyes, ducked his head, and retired a good deal more quickly than he had come. For some minutes he was kept waiting, and then came a lull. "Now," we all shouted, pulling the rope, and he came round to us with a rush, but benumbed with cold, and breathless. That corner is about the only place I can recall where the wind was too great to allow of movement. Such a position must be rare, even to mountaineers. It was certainly the "tit-bit" of the day.

We were now nearing the top of our climb, and none of us much regretted the fact. Wet through, shivering, and hungry, we longed for a sheltered corner we remembered on the far side of the peak. The remaining rocks were tackled with a will; another 50 feet of moderately easy going brought us to the summit cairn which we hurried past to our corner, where was shelter and comparative warmth.

All sorts of good things were provided and quickly disposed of; our spirits rose as quickly as material things fell, and all were agreed that we had had a "ripping time"—a conclusion which the appearance of our nether garments rather emphasised. Tweed and gabbro had evidently interchanged many civilities, with disastrous effects to the former.

The top of the sgurr is a most desolate place. A friend of mine has a mania for "planting trees on all desolate places." He is one of the society which advocates this kind of thing; we agreed to advise him the top of our peak as being deserted

and lonely enough. A few holly trees to give colour to the name of "the Coolin" were voted suitable. It is doubtful whether his society would take the proposal seriously; but if one fine day holly trees are found on the top of Sgurr Mhic Choinnich we trust credit will be given where it is due!

A proposal to descend to the col by way of King's Chimney was met with disapproval. Lunch over, we therefore followed the ridge along in the direction of Bealach Coire Lagan. This is fairly narrow in places, if followed religiously along the crest.

A few feet down on the Coruisk side the going was more sheltered, however, and our heads were seldom put above the ridge until it was necessary to cross over to the Corrie Lagan side in 'order to obviate the precipitous drop which occurs before the bealach is reached. We hurried down the broken rocks, past a curious hole in the ridge, to their foot, and shortly after reached the bealach. It had been on our programme at the start of the day to climb An Stac, the steep buttress now facing us, which culminates at the Inaccessible Pinnacle. It was descended in 1892 by Messrs. Carr, Gibson, Wicks, and Morse. They took three-quarters of an hour in its descent, and left a record that the going was continuously steep, and that care was needed because of loose rocks. I have been unable to unearth any record of its having been ascended; it was a great disappointment to us to be robbed of it by the impossible conditions then prevailing.

The wind, "tearing in mad hunt" across the

ridge, forbade us try it, however, so we rushed helter-skelter down through the tempest to Loch Lagan. Before reaching it we observed a most wonderful cloud-effect. A gust of unusual violence rent a hole in the driving mist, and there, straight across from us, vignetted through a woolly expanse of white cloud which obliterated their lower buttresses, stood out, coal-black and grim, Sgurr Alasdair and Sgurr Tearlach. The vignette lasted an appreciable time, and then began slowly to move across, causing the peaks to appear as though heeling over; then the wind settled down and a curtain of cloud drew across, leaving nothing but a formless wall of mist.

At Loch Lagan we got out of the clouds. In passing round the corner of Sron Dearg we made the closer inspection of a detached pinnacle of rock, which had evidently been previously visited by climbers. Its sides were scratched all over by nail-marks, and a small cairn on its crest completed the sacrilege. We added our quota and then strolled down to our quarters at Glen Brittle, well pleased with our day of storm and hail on Sgurr Mhic Choinnich.

Sgurr Coire an Lochain.—The branch ridge running out from the eastern flank of Sgurr Mhic Choinnich, separates Coreachan Ruadha from Coir an Lochain. About a mile due west from Loch Coruisk it terminates in a well-defined peak, which sends down in the direction of the loch a steep precipice but little short of 1000 feet in height. The dip of the rock on the Coruisk face is outward and downward. Great laminated slabs overlap each other from summit to base. The

angle of the slab surfaces is fairly steep, and the end of each is generally perpendicular. The whole formation has been somewhat aptly likened to "boiler-plates." This formation is not, as a rule, favourable to climbers, who rather prefer the lay of the rocks to be inwards, but it is peculiar to most of the eastern faces of the main ridge.

It must not be thought that this "wrong" stratification would be a sufficient deterrent to climbers, however, nor is it the reason for the comparative neglect of this little peak. The reasons are probably to be found in the facts that it is very remote from climbing centres, and that it is overshadowed by the finer mountains of the main ridge. Be this as it may, there exists no record of it having been climbed before 1896, when Messrs. Collie, Naismith, and Howell, with John Mackenzie, reversing the usual order of things, made its first ascent from what was obviously its most difficult side. They started from a camp beside Loch Coruisk. The late Mr. W. Brown writes of their ascent that—"it gave over 1000 feet of rock-climbing, and occupied two and a half hours, mostly across steeply-inclined slabs of wet and rather slippery rock—not of the ordinary coarse-grained gabbro. Though no part was specially difficult, nearly every step required care, and good anchorages were few and far between. No signs of previous visitors were found either during the climb or on the top, so that the peak was probably virgin. A small cairn was built, and the party then descended to the gap on the south-west side, and followed for some distance the long ridge which joins Sgurr Coire an Lochain with Sgurr

Mhic Choinnich."[1] Their climb started a short distance to the left, or south of the lowest point of the buttress, and the route followed was, as far as the steep undercut edges of the slabs would permit, directly upward to the top. As far as I know, their ascent has not been repeated; indeed, it is doubtful if a dozen people in all have actually trodden the summit of this "peak of the little loch in the corrie."

[1] *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, vol. iv. p. 206.

CHAPTER XII

SGURR ALASDAIR AND SGURR TEARLACH

THE magnificent peak that dominates the branch ridge separating Coire Lagan from Coire na Ghrundda has now, beyond all dispute, been identified as the highest of the Coolin. The latest Ordnance Survey measurements gave it a material lift, much to the delight of its many admirers, who had a lurking misgiving lest its *vis-à-vis*, Sgurr Dearg, might after all dispossess it of the premier position.

It very commonly happens that the highest point of a mountain range or group is but a rounded mass, comparatively easy of access, and possessing in itself little merit beyond that of mere bulk. One has only to compare Monte Rosa with the Matterhorn, Elbruz with Ushba, or, to come down with a rush, Scawfell Pike with Great Gable, to see that the satellites of a great peak are often finer objects than the peak itself.

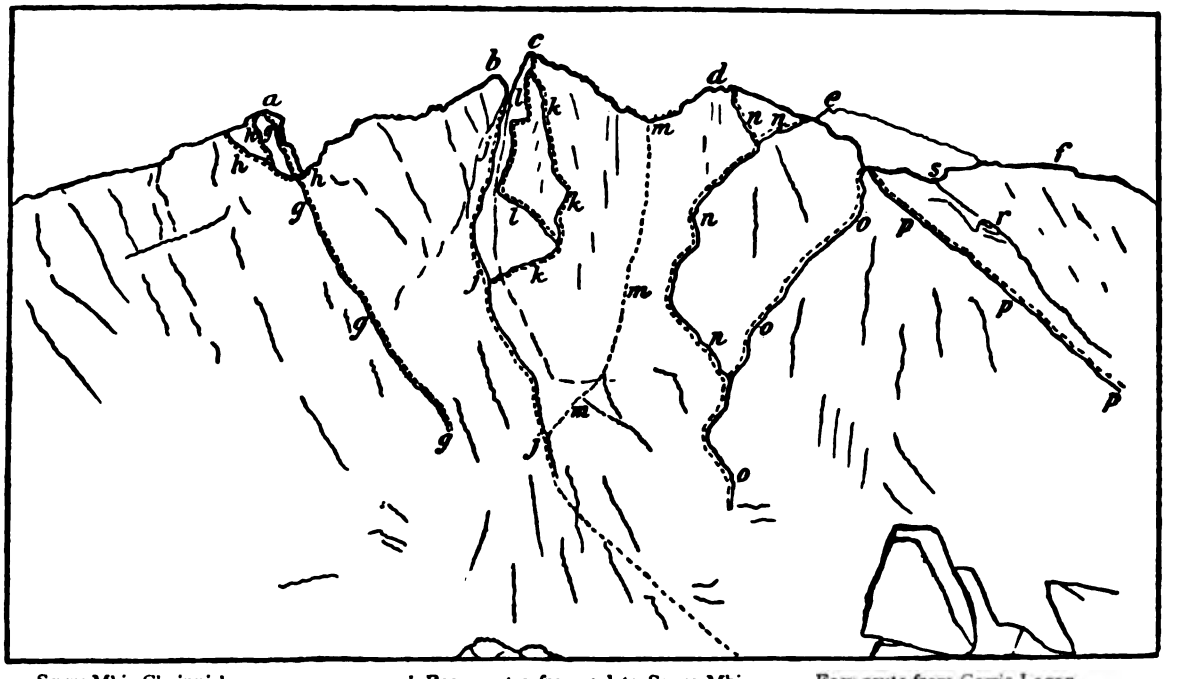
With Sgurr Alasdair, however, it is my humble opinion that the reverse obtains—the highest peak of the Coolin is the finest of them all. It towers above the wildest and most fantastic peaks of the ridge, and its steep sides plunge downwards into the two most impressive corries in the British Isles.

In itself it is a magnificent mountain form. If

the final cone possessed hundreds of feet instead of only modest tens, it would hold a place for natural beauty and massive grandeur in rock-scenery second to none. Given this much, it is then only size that it lacks, and this, after all, is to the mountaineer but a matter of perspective and a day or two in which to grade his ideas. I have often remarked how quickly amongst the mountains the eye accustoms itself to the size of its surroundings. After two or three months among our island hills the giants of Switzerland quite startle one on account of their size, and the first day or two of a Swiss holiday are, for this reason, full of freshness.

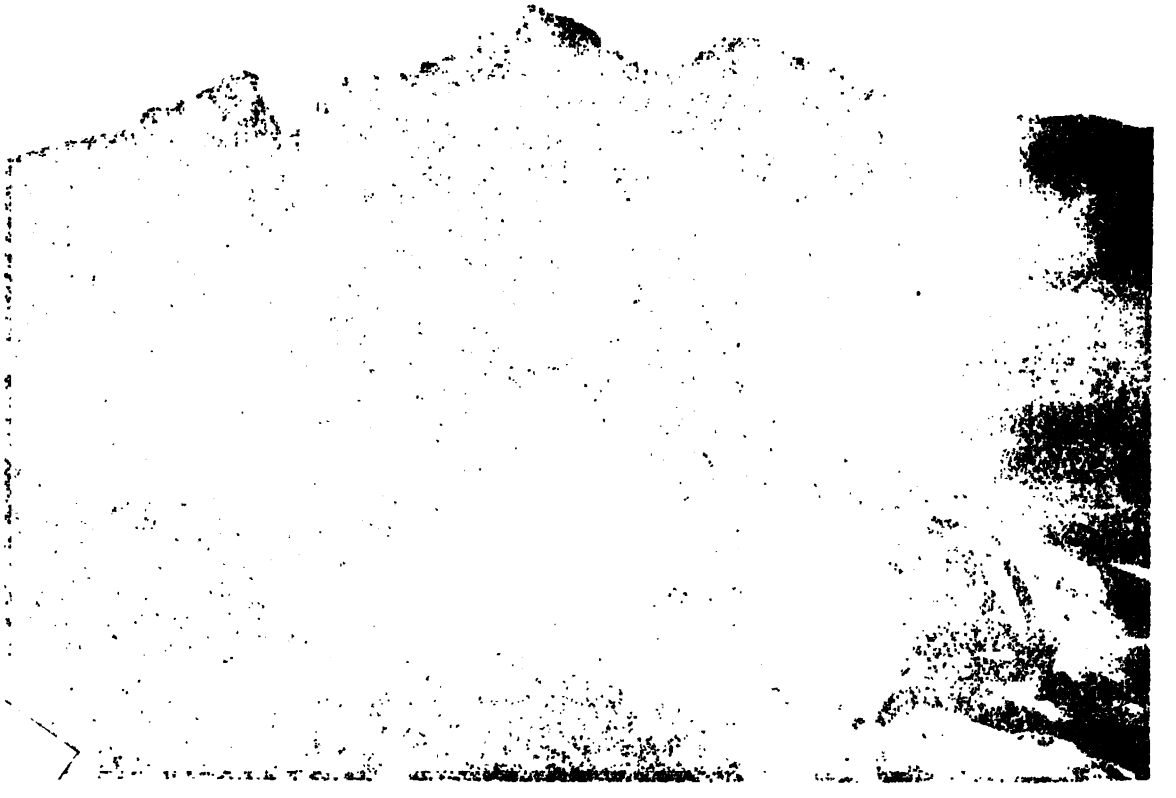
But by about the third day it is rather their shape and architecture that fascinate one. And after three days have been spent in Skye, I venture to suggest that Sgurr Alasdair will arouse the greatest feelings of pleasure in its beholders, not only by reason of its wonderful setting and beautiful form, but because of the impression of size that it conveys.

Sgurr Alasdair is separated from its neighbour on the north-east, Sgurr Tearlach, by a deep clean-cut gap. Running downwards to the head of Corrie Lagan from this gap is an open gully filled with stones of all sizes, for the most part lying at the maximum angle of rest. This is the Great Stone Shoot, and it was by way of this natural funnel that the late Sheriff Nicolson made the first known ascent of Sgurr Alasdair. "The climb up on the other side of the corrie" (he had just descended from Sgurr Dearg into Corrie Lagan) "was stiff and warm, and some judgment was required to

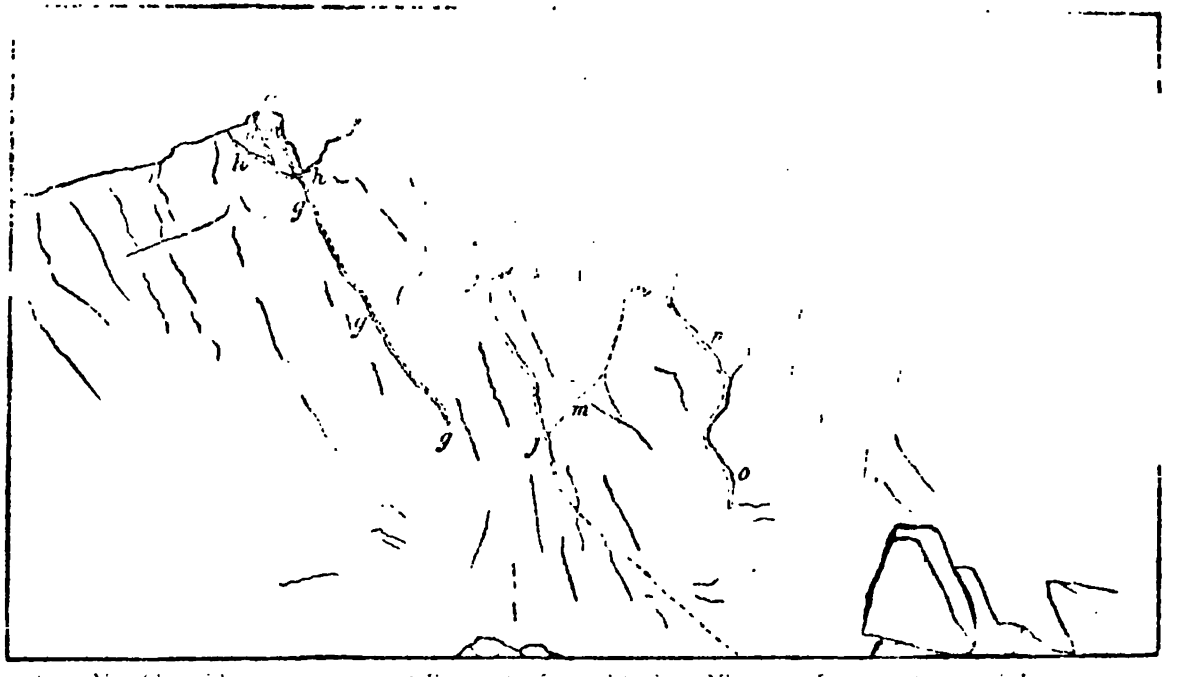


a Sgurr Mhic Choinnich.
b Sgurr Tearlach. *c* Sgurr Alasdair.
d Sgurr Sgumain. *e* Sgurr nan Eag.
f Sron na Ciche.
g West Buttress climb, Sgurr Mhic Choinnich.
h Easy routes from col to Sgurr Mhic Choinnich. *j* The Great Stone Shoot.
k Dr. Collie's North-west climb on Sgurr Alasdair.
l The Northern climb on Sgurr Alasdair (route described).
m Easy route from Corrie Lagan.
n Northern Buttress, Sgurr Sgumain.
o Easy route to Sgurr Sgumain.
p Western Buttress, Sgurr Sgumain.
r The Ladies' Pinnacle.
s Bealach Coire Ghrundda.

THE CLIMBS FROM CORRIE LAGAN



SGURR MAIRI AND MAISDAIR FROM SGURR DEARG



a Sgurr Mòr (Ben Alligin).
b Sgurr Dubh. *c* Sgurr Aeneas.
d Sgurr Sgumain. *e* Sgurr na h-Aisge.
f Sgurr na Lochan.
g West Portion of climb, Sgurr Mòr to Sgurr Aeneas.
h Eastern ridge from col to Sgurr Mòr.
i Direct ascent of Sgurr Mòr.
k Dr. Collie's North-west climb on Sgurr Alasdair.
l The Northern Climb on Sgurr Alasdair (route described).
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THE CLIMBS FROM CORRIE HOGAN

SGURR ALAISDAIR FROM SGURR DEARG.

find a way, and still more when it came to circumventing the peak. We did it, however, without much difficulty: one or two places were somewhat trying, requiring good grip of hands and feet; but on the whole I have seen worse places." Such is his account in *Good Words* for 1875.

His ascent was made in 1873, and at that time the peak had no name. Sgurr Sgumain, its south-west dependency, was the only name allocated to this spur of the main ridge, and Sheriff Nicolson thought that it must have been intended for what we now call Sgurr Alasdair. Any confusion or uncertainty that existed has been settled in the happiest manner, for the highest point is now called after him, the peak on the main ridge to the north-east of Sgurr Alasdair being named Sgurr Tearlach, in honour of Mr. Charles Pilkington.

These black monoliths now commemorate the names of two men whose exploits will ever be interwoven with the history of the Coolin. There seems something peculiarly appropriate about the juxtaposition of these peaks and in the names they bear, for it is safe to say that none have done so much to bring the mountains of Skye to the notice of climbers as have these two pioneers. And a fitting reward is theirs! What proud monuments they possess! How different these pedestals of gabbro with their crowns of basaltic lava keeping watch over the lonely corries, and washed by the salt rains and cleansing winds of the broad Atlantic, from those statues built by men's hands and besmirched with the grime and soot of our great cities!

There are some who cavil at the calling of mountain peaks after those who first explored and correctly appraised them, but to me such a close relationship has always seemed in harmony. Certainly such a method of nomenclature is infinitely preferable to that which identifies fine mountain forms with an unpleasant disease[1] or ignominous death![2]

Sgurr Alasdair.—After the ascent by way of the hot grind up the Stone Shoot, the next easiest route up Sgurr Alasdair from Glen Brittle lies over the top of Sgurr Sgumain, following the long shoulder of Sron na Ciche from the valley and keeping fairly continuously to the ridge all the way. Between the two peaks, the ridge is serrated by some weird-looking and not very stable pinnacles. These can be passed quite easily by keeping to the screes on the right, whence the ridge can be regained and followed for a short distance without hindrance, until a rock-wall about 20 feet high bars the way. The direct ascent of this can scarcely be called easy, but by keeping again to the right it can be circumvented. Thence the somewhat friable ridge can easily be reached above this wall and followed to the top of Sgurr Alasdair.

The depression between Sgurrs Alasdair and Sgumain can also be gained without difficulty, howbeit with exceedingly hard work, from the corries on either side, by striking straight up the screes and broken rock to its lowest point.

But none of these routes are for inexperienced

[1] Sgurr na Banachdich = The Small-pox Peak.
[2] Am Basteir = The Executioner.

pedestrians, "especially in doubtful weather, for Sgurr Alasdair is a true mountain and not a hill like Ben Lomond or Skiddaw." [1]

It is very often ascended from Coruisk, crossing over Sgurr Tearlach *en route*, and it was from this side that I gained my first impression of the highest Coolin. That ascent is particularly memorable because the late Mr. Alfred Williams was connected with it.

No book on the mountains of Skye would be complete unless it contained some reference to him, for he made the first really accurate drawing of the ridge from end to end. This appeared in an early number of the *Alpine Journal*.[2] He was an artist who devoted the bulk of his time and talents to the mountains, and he possessed the peculiar charm and gentleness of the man who is in constant intercourse with them.

He did a vast amount to bring climbers to Skye. I well remember what an interest he took in my party when we arrived at Sligachan, and how he helped us in every possible way to know the Coolin. He had two or three small, wooden erections pitched at the side of the stream running from Coruisk to Scavaig; these he used as a camp from which to paint his "Coruisks." His hospitality was invariably extended to climbers, and he was never happier than when entertaining enthusiasts in his wooden huts. Many of the older school will recall with great pleasure evenings spent in his company, and the amusing

[1] *Vide* Mr. C. Pilkington's article in the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, vol. i. p. 142.

[2] February 1888, vol. xiii.

tales he told of mountaineers who had paid him a call.

A certain president of the Alpine Club once climbed over from Glen Brittle with three friends, but Mr. Williams had left for Sligachan a few hours previously. They were very thirsty, and knowing the whereabouts of his larder (a well-hidden hole in an adjacent rock) refreshed themselves therefrom. On their arrival at the inn they saw Mr. Williams, and the president, as spokesman, said, "Ah, Williams, you are a man to be envied. You're the richer by the heart-felt thanks of four weary, thirsty climbers, but" (*sotto voce*) "the poorer by six bottles of beer!"

The gusto with which Mr. Williams related the incident left no doubt in my mind that they were heartily welcome. One of them then asked his companions if they could tell him why Williams was a better man than Moses. The answer was not far to seek when they remembered the rock cupboard from which their host was wont to bring his whisky!

The night we spent at Coruisk with him was not a great success so far as sleep was concerned. The heather mattress with which he provided us was all that could be desired, but, unfortunately, some rats gnawed at the underside of the flooring boards for the greater part of the night. The rest of the time, until about 3 A.M., they spent in clambering up one side of our hut and glissading down the other, emitting a shrill squeak of content as their bodies came to the ground. I went outside to join in the fun, but the boot I flung at them missed its object and trundled away into

the stream beyond. After regaining it I hurried back to the hut and found my companions seated outside, busy with preparations for breakfast.

We got under way shortly after four o'clock and followed along the north shore of the loch until its upper end was reached. Here we made a bee-line for the dip in the ridge under the steep southern face of Sgurr Mhic Choinnich. The walk thence along the skyline to Sgurr Tearlach (in those days it was known as the North-East Peak) afforded magnificent views of the great northern precipice of Sgurr Alasdair. Half an hour later we stood on its summit.

Sgurr Alasdair by the North Face.—The precipice which plunges almost sheer from the summit into Corrie Lagan constitutes the chief attraction which Sgurr Alasdair has for the rock-climber, and is the feature to which it owes much of its individuality. This precipice is typical of many of the Coolin rock-faces, inasmuch as it is rounded in contour, very steep as a whole, well broken up in detail, and possesses no continuous gully or strongly defined arête.

Professor Collie first noticed its climbing possibilities and, with Messrs. Naismith and Howell, made its ascent in September 1896.

At the foot of the Great Stone Shoot "they diverged to the rocks on the right and climbed a chimney." A short note on their climb appears in the January number of the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal* for 1897, from which I glean that they then crossed an easy slope to the foot of a ridge, which they followed directly to the summit. The account sums up the climb by

saying that it is about 1000 feet in height, that it is a most delightful one, and that the rocks, though extremely steep, present magnificent holds.

A climb which my party did on this face may or may not have been the one recorded, for the details given are somewhat meagre, but the general line of our route can be readily identified by its proximity to the Great Stone Shoot.

The north-west precipice falls over vertically into the "Shoot," forming a clean-cut wall, along the crest of which lay our climb. It would seem impossible to follow this crest in its entirety, for at a place high up there occurs some excessively steep rock, the angle of which is about on a par with its friable nature. Perpendicular rocks which, moreover, are loose, conduce to climbing that is too sporting for most people, particularly if what an artist friend of mine once most graphically called "the fall" be as great as that on this face of Sgurr Alasdair. It should be said at once that the upper part of the face is of somewhat unstable basalt, and that the rough firm rock which characterises most of the Coolin climbs is only in evidence in small, isolated outcrops.

Nevertheless, the climb takes one into some very fine situations and provides work that will prove ample compensation for the toilsome ascent to its foot from Glen Brittle.

My first acquaintance with the north face of Sgurr Alasdair was made in the summer of 1906. A party of us had been climbing from Sligachan for about three weeks and had exhausted nearly all the climbs within reasonable distance of that comfortable but somewhat remote hostel. So we

decided to spend a night up in Corrie Lagan and climb from there.

Very few parties at all acquainted with the Coolin draw up their programme for a climbing holiday without including as an item a spell of camping out. And very wisely so too, because the long tramps to the climbs are apt to pall upon even the strongest and most enthusiastic. It is all very well to sit at home and reckon the bare mileage between Sligachan and Corrie Lagan, or Coruisk, and think that good climbing can be done at the end of it, but by the time Glen Sligachan or Glen Brittle has been traversed once or twice, staleness intervenes. At this stage the climber's fancy eagerly turns to thoughts of camp. Wherefore a more or less useful tent, eked out with sundry mackintosh sheets and provisions, generally plays an important part in the outfit of climbers going Skyewards.

But Skye is not altogether an ideal place for camping. Many are the records of parties that have struggled valiantly from Sligachan over Druimhain to Coruisk, where they have pitched their tent, utilising perhaps two fine days in so doing, and then have been driven back by bad weather to more solid shelter at the inn. Some of these have been lucky enough to get another fine day during their stay, upon which to regain their tent and accessories before starting homeward. Others have stuck valiantly to their canvas home until such time as the rain has washed it bodily into the loch; their efforts thereafter have been not so much in bagging peaks as in futile endeavours to

regain their own. I speak in all seriousness. It is not a subject to be treated lightly. If proof of this be lacking, the said campers will forcibly supply it.

Others there be—and perhaps after all these are in a majority—who have pitched their tent, and been blessed with fine weather and unimpaired digestion. Of these one does not hear so much. Climbers, like other people, say less about their successes than their reverses. It is the unfortunate who wail the loudest. Some friends of mine once took tents, mackintosh sheet and so on, to Coruisk, but the weather was so fine for three weeks on end that they never even pitched them, but just slept out in the open. These men swear that Skye is much maligned in the matter of weather.

My own efforts at camping had, before 1906, been such dismal failures, however, that I was anxious to try some other method of getting at the climbs in Corrie Lagan. My party decided to wait at Sligachan for settled weather, and then, with sleeping bags and provisions, camp up at Loch Lagan. This seemed less trouble than taking a tent, and, at the worst, would enable us to come back to our "base" without leaving any property necessitating a special journey for recovery.

The day upon which we started was hot and the sky clear. The pleasures of the lovely drive round to Glen Brittle were enhanced by thoughts of the jolly time we should have sleeping out above the 2000-foot line near Loch Lagan. Our spirits were rather checked at Glen Brittle when we found that all the farm hands were busy with the shearing, and that not one could be spared to help us

up the Corrie with our "bags" and provisions. Our driver was a lusty man, however, but when we showed him a certain bundle and asked him to accompany us with the said bundle upon his back, he glanced upward at the mountains and averred that they were "no canny," and that he "couldna leave his beasties." But the "beasties" looked as though they needed a rest; the uncanniness of the mountains was somewhat diminished by the promise of payment, and before long our jehu was struggling manfully upward with our bundle. Having made up his mind, he set a hot pace and gave us plenty to do to keep up with him as far as Loch an' Fhir-bhallaich. Above this the ground became rougher, the way steeper, and the scenery more desolate, until a promise of increased payment became necessary to induce him to accompany us further.

But at last we reached the upper corrie, and he flung down his burden on one of the great glaciated slabs near the outlet of Loch Lagan. By this time his aversion to the mountains had got so much the upper hand of him that he refused even to have a little whisky, a state which is, to say the least, a little unusual in a Highlander.

He just looked disgustedly round at our proposed quarters for the night and opined that "some folks are no' sensible in their habits"; then, as a possible glimpse of our sanity struck him, he sighed, "Ah, weel, there's nae accoontin' for tastes," and, after pocketing his "siller" and some tobacco, took his departure with all speed. Men with so little love of the hills are becoming scarce nowadays.

How any sane person could dislike Corrie Lagan as it then appeared, quite passed our comprehension. It was sunlit, warm, and beautiful. So enamoured of our surroundings were we that we decided to spend several nights there, instead of only one, as originally intended. Two of us began to set things in order, and were so doing when we heard a splash in the loch. We looked round in alarm, and, missing our companion, feared he had fallen in. A red face, wreathed in content, soon appeared on the surface of the water, however, and we laughed at our fears. He revelled in his bath and swam across to the far side and then came running towards us in the sunlight, and little else, scudding along, as a seafaring man would put it, "under bare poles."

We left him to finish the unpacking while we followed his example, shortly afterwards striking up the screes to the mouth of the Stone Shoot. Slightly above this point the great wall of Sgurr Alasdair abuts upon it, and here we took to the rocks. A narrow, oblique gully running from right to left, about 100 feet in height, seemed the most interesting start to the climb. It was a purely "fancy" piece of climbing, however, for its ascent was in no way necessary, and by keeping a few feet along past it to the right, broken rocks could be reached. The ascent of these is quite easy and gives out on huge masses of scree which can be crossed towards the top of the oblique gully. Above this the rocks were steep, but splintered, and offered good climbing which could be obviated by keeping again to the right and scrambling up the scree which leads, by way of a shallow, easy gully,

to a point immediately below the steep buttress which culminates at the summit of the mountain.

No further was it possible to walk up scree with the object of joining the climb at a higher point. The buttress now provided that essential of a good climb—the easiest way upward lay over steep rock, necessitating a certain amount of knowledge of rock-craft in order to find it. Our position overlooked the Great Stone Shoot, the drop over into it being apparently quite sheer. Straight above us towered the greatest cliff of this face of Sgurr Alasdair. Its upper rocks overhung us, and were not hidden by those near at hand; even from below they looked perpendicular. Away to the right it would have been possible to traverse horizontally some 100 feet or so to the screes which led upward to the pinnacles between Sgurrs Alasdair and Sgumain. Over all the intervening distance no easy way of ascent suggested itself, although doubtless some upward route could be found.[1]

We built a small cairn at our present position and then struck straight upward for about 30 feet, over good sound rock, to a small sloping ledge quite devoid of anchorage. Beyond this the rocks were very steep and none too firm. An open groove seamed the face directly above us, and we chose this as the only apparent means of advance. I paid out the leader's rope as he worked steadily upward. My position was an entirely unsafe one had a slip occurred, and I could do nothing to better it. It was one of those places

[1] Dr. Collie's climb lay up these intervening rocks, as I discovered later.

up which one would much rather lead than climb second. The leader in such a place knows all the time the exact extent of the difficulty, and his attention is engrossed in overcoming it; but the second man can only pay out the rope carefully, watch his companion climb slowly upward, glance around between whiles at the appalling drop on either hand, and comfort himself with the remembrance of similar places in which he has been, and the steadiness of his friend as a leader, fervently hoping the while (and occasionally even giving expression to the hope) that the man above will "climb mighty carefully!" The second man should possess no nerves and little imagination if he wish really to enjoy such positions. The present one was the more trying because of the looseness of the rock. More than once I saw my friend test a handhold carefully, and, when he was almost about to use it, it would quiver and be rejected with a long-drawn "Ah!" in favour of another. But all things come to an end, and I soon had a cheery summons to "come along." Our third man then joined me, and I climbed up the groove until the small platform at the top was reached.

Here we again had an uninterrupted view down into the Great Stone Shoot, a fact which I mention as showing the line of our route. We were now directly under the rocks that had looked so sheer from lower down; after two futile efforts to force a way higher, it seemed that we had come to an *impasse*.

We had tried straight upward and at a point slightly to the right.

There still remained a chance of climbing to the left, along the vertical face which overlooks the Stone Shoot, and thence straight upward to the top of the overhanging part. Our leader accordingly started along to the left, and I followed him as far as was safe, held over a good belay by the third man. Slowly the leader's rope went out until I could see his body in profile against the skyline, at a very short distance above my level. Here he stayed for a good while.

"What is it like?" I inquired; and, after a pause, he answered that he thought he could, with great difficulty, get to a point from which he could make further progress. He was not certain about it, however, but said that he feared he could not get back again in case he should be mistaken. Wherefore I reminded him that "discretion is the better part of valour," and otherwise did my best to dissuade him. My efforts, backed up by the steepness and friable nature of the rock and the terrific drop immediately below him, prevailed; we climbed back again to our third man.

Here I brightened their disappointment by relating a reminiscence of a certain situation in which I once found myself, where the bearing of discretion upon valour was about similar. The incident happened many years ago in Eskdale, in the Lake district, I being then but a very small boy.

An elderly relative—a somewhat dictatorial gentleman—and I were anxious to visit Stanley Ghyll Waterfall. It was necessary to get a key

for the gate leading into the grounds from the gamekeeper's house. For some reason or other the woman was very "short" with my relative, whereupon he told her he had a perfect right to visit the falls, which rather annoyed her. She ultimately gave us the key with a very poor grace, and we duly inspected Stanley Ghyll.

Upon our return to the cottage we found that the gamekeeper—a burly six-foot Cumbrian dalesman—had come home. To him also my companion aired his views about his "rights," and we were just walking down the gravel path leading to the road, after having had the best of the argument, when a big black retriever dashed past us with a growl.

"Call off that beast," shouted my irate relative, clapping his hand to his hip-pocket as though he carried a revolver, "or I'll put a bullet through it."

The reply of the gamekeeper was somewhat disconcerting. He retired into his cottage and at once emerged with a double-barrelled fowling-piece which he pointed in our direction.

"Now then," he shouted, "I'm ready to talk to you. You begin by shooting my dog." An imaginary revolver is a poor weapon against a real fowling-piece. Our exit was more effective than orderly. The forcible way in which my companion afterwards impressed on me the old adage about discretion being the better part of valour has often recurred to me when on the rocks, and the odds have seemed as great against us as they were that day at Stanley Ghyll.

My companions approved the story, but were unwilling to apply its moral to our present cir-

cumstances and beat a retreat by the way we had come.

We therefore cast around for another means of extricating ourselves. On our right the face of the cliff was quite sheer and was not a reassuring place up which to force a way. During my story, however, we had been sitting down; this brought our eyes into the shade cast by the cliff, and caused us to notice a dark chimney which had escaped our sight when standing up in the direct light of the sun. The outside wall of this chimney was only about a foot thick, and looked so unstable that we feared to use it, lest it might fall bodily away. But here a piece of good fortune favoured us, for its interior and wall proved to be sound rock, caused by a small outcrop of gabbro.

Our leader traversed a few feet along until he came to its foot, and we shortly had the satisfaction of seeing him mount rapidly to the top of the chimney, where he disappeared round a corner above us; he then shouted down that he had found anchorage and that I was to join him. This I did with a good deal less difficulty than I had expected: the chimney was steep and its situation exposed, but the holds it offered were rough and firm, and in pleasant contrast to those of the rocks we had just left.

These were again in evidence at the top of the chimney, and formed a somewhat shaky arête along which I climbed to a sloping ledge.

As the third man came up he built a small cairn at the end of the arête. It stood perkily out on the edge, a cheeky little erection which can be seen from any part of the main ridge between

[illegible] Mhic Choinnich and Sgurr Tearlach, and [illegible] by the Steep Snow.

[illegible] and slightly to the right, an[illegible] short chimney-crack led us gaily upward to [illegible] rock which corresponded steeply for about a [illegible] hundred feet to the top of Sgurr Alas[illegible]. The upper part of the cloud was rather dis[illegible] for only some perfect, a few feet below [illegible] did it spoil for any special effort.[1]

[illegible] we enjoyed the benefit of sleeping at [illegible]. Instead of having to scurry down [illegible] to be in time for dinner, or a trap [illegible] Sligachan, we were able to traverse Sgurr [illegible] to the Tearlach-Dubh Gap.

Tearlach-Dubh Gap.—This is situated [illegible] ridge of the Coolin, and occurs at a [illegible] below the top of Sgurr Tear[illegible] the [illegible] facing Sgurr Dubh.

[illegible] is a terrific cleft in the narrow, [illegible] ridge. Its upper wall is about [illegible] and descends into the cleft at an [illegible] removed from the perpendicular. Runn[illegible] downward on either hand from the lowe[illegible] are two steep gullies, one terminat[illegible] below in Coir a'Ghrunndda, and the other [illegible] an Lochain. The floor of the gap is [illegible] by huge jammed boulders which block upper ends of the two gullies. The wall on lower (southern) side of the gap is 25 feet [illegible] as upright as the wall of a house.

[illegible] the above I have climbed the buttress to the right (west) [illegible] learn that it was up it as that Dr. Collie's ascent lay. A [illegible] outline drawing and its accompanying illustration will [illegible]. It remains to be said that Dr. Collie's route [illegible] long, but that ours is the more difficult—a somewhat [illegible] tion.

THE UPPER ROCKS OF SGURR ALAISDAIR

It is not necessary to cross the Tearlach-Dubh Gap in order to reach Sgurr Dubh from Sgurr Tearlach, for an easy way can be found by scrambling to the dip between Sgurr Alasdair and Sgumain, whence a continuous line of scree can be followed downward, and then traversed across the head of Coir a'Ghrundda until the ridge is regained in the neighbourhood of Bealach Coir' an Lochain.

This is a very poor substitute for the passage of the gap, however, and one which should only be adopted when iced rocks or other untoward causes render it necessary.

One of the earlier writers on Sgurr Alasdair says that its summit is a lovely spot for a long halt on a fine day, and goes on to advise the ardent climber to devote to it at least an hour of his misspent life. Bearing the above writer in mind, and having our desire to oblige him assisted by a particularly hot day, we took considerably more than the prescribed hour. The sun was already beginning to tinge the topmost rocks with red when we bestirred ourselves and scrambled downward to the head of the Great Stone Shoot. From here a few feet of steep scrambling soon took us to the top of Sgurr Tearlach. The descent thence to the edge of the upper wall of the gap is quite easy, and before long we were craning over into the abyss, wondering if we had struck the right route. Seen from above, the wall was too steep to allow of our learning much about it. It was necessary to descend more or less in the steps of faith, picking out the most feasible way downward while held pretty tightly

by the rope from above. As most climbers cross the Tearlach-Dubh Gap in the opposite direction from that in which we were going, it will perhaps be better to detail our return from the Bealach nan Lochain, which was the furthest point reached that day.

A short distance above the bealach (for long ago called the Tearlach-Dubh Col), the easy ascent abutted upon a steep nose of rock. This we clambered straight up, but its ascent can be effected more easily by turning 3 or 4 feet to the left side. Above the lower few feet the rock is not so steep, and we scrambled quickly upward until we found ourselves at the top of a well-defined pinnacle, the north side of which [illegible] vertically downward into the Tearlach-[illegible].[1]

[illegible] descent is decidedly awkward, but [illegible] quite safe by hitching the rope [illegible] efficient spike of rock at the top. On this occasion, however, the rope refused to come down after us. My companions had descended, and I followed on the rope, but after gaining the gap our combined efforts to jerk it off the belay only succeeded in tightly jamming it. I therefore scrambled up to the top again, and made sure it slipped along freely; but after descending, again refused to be withdrawn. For the fourth time I climbed that steep wall, and this time made sure of our rope by throwing it down first, then descending by the elementary methods of course. The hand- and foot-holds are really good, although somewhat small, and a hitched

[1] The view opposite is taken from the top of this pinnacle.

THE UPPER WALL OF THE TEARLACH-DUBH GAP.

rope can well be dispensed with if the wall has already been climbed three times in one day.

The steep sides of the gap framed a magnificent view in both directions, one across Corrie na Ghrundda to the island-studded sea, and the other, much the finer of the two, over Sgurr Coire an Lochain to Sgurr nan Gillean and the Red Hills. The long, purple-tinged shadows cast by the setting sun lent a weirdness of effect that was in great contrast to the brightness of the scene seaward. Our time was too short for more than a passing glance, however, for the upper side of the gap and the Great Stone Shoot lay between us and our quarters at Loch Lagan.

A short, narrow crack not unlike that on the Napes Needle, but much easier, afforded the most inviting way upward to a small ledge.[1] The second man can join the leader here, and could no doubt render him assistance for the next stretch, which is very steep. If the rocks be dry such assistance will scarcely be necessary, and I economised time by climbing without delay to the top. Here I made myself comfortable, and took in the rope hand over hand as my companions climbed quickly upward.

After agreeing unanimously that this gap affords the finest bit of climbing on the main ridge, we traversed off Sgurr Tearlach to the left, along a ledge which brought us to a point a few feet below the top of the Great Stone Shoot. We soon gained its crest, and hurried downward between the two great walls that hem it in. These are very steep

[1] The knee of the lower figure in the photograph facing p. 228 is upon this ledge.

for a considerable height, and as we rattled downwards they threw the noise of the screes from side to side in a manner that was almost deafening.

Mr. Colin Phillip has suggested the name Fheadain a'Cloiches (the Chanter of Stones) for this place, and it would seem a most appropriate one. Whether the average Scotchman would be pleased by the inevitable comparison between the music of his beloved pipes and the din of the rattling screes is another matter. Be this as it may, they form the quickest means of gaining the head of Corrie Lagan, and before long we shot out on to the small plateau above the loch. Here we undressed and again celebrated our arrival at the water with a swim, before turning to the more sober occupation of making supper.

A small spirit cooking-stove enabled us, in the short space of ten minutes, to make hot soup and coffee. We feasted right royally in the shelter of one of the great glacier-worn slabs near the shore of the loch, and enjoyed to the full the delights of the "life outside."

And what a thing this outside life is! What a grand rush of content, physical and mental, envelops a man up there among the free expanse of rock, water, and air! There one is not hampered in the half-dark cells men call houses, and the ills of civilisation can be forgotten for a time. Perfect health, the rude, robust, fighting health enjoyed by our early forebears, becomes a real thing. Those who know it—those who have spent nights out on the mountains—have enjoyed a right which every man ought to experience once in a while, but which, alas! seldom or never

comes to the great majority of civilised human beings.

We selected a dry patch of grass and thrust ourselves into our sleeping bags until only our heads were outside. Our range of vision included the long sweep of the corrie downward to Loch Brittle, and, far beyond, to the islands dotting the ocean away on the distant horizon.

Pipe after pipe was enjoyed in huge content, while the night came stealing over the face of the water, and the moon peeped round the shoulder of Sgurr Sgumain, illuminating the peaks above us with a weird, uncertain light.

It has been my good fortune to lie on the summit of the Matterhorn and look away across the sea of peaks to Mont Blanc, sixty miles distant; to sit at the old *gîte* on the Weisshorn, and see the night chase the evening mists up the sides of the Dom and Täschhorn, and to watch the sun rise and flush red over the grand dome of Mont Blanc; but I can recall none of these things, beautiful and memorable as they were, so vividly to mind as that perfect night up in lonely Corrie Lagan.

When our delight in the scene was finally ended I do not know, for the moon glistening on the water, the mystic islands out at sea, and the great black peaks looming overhead merged imperceptibly into the dreamless unconscious sleep of the tired climber.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRECIPICE OF SRON NA CICHE, SGURR SGUMAIN

THE great wall of rock which bounds Corrie Lagan on the south-east is the most remarkable and the most interesting, from a climbing point of view, in the whole of the Coolin.

Starting out of the plain between Loch Brittle and the mountains, at an altitude but little above sea-level, is a rough promontory, the crest of which is grass- and scree-covered. This rises abruptly and continues upward unbroken, narrowing as it gains altitude, and with sides quite perpendicular in places, until it culminates in the graceful peak of Sgumain, only slightly more than 200 feet below, and in close proximity to, the highest summit in the island.

The cliffs of Sgurr Sgumain which sweep over into Corrie Lagan are in two sections, the lower of which is a magnificent precipice of great steepness. This is separated from the upper section by a long *couloir*, full of great boulders and screes, which is known as the Sgumain Stone Shoot. To the ridge of the lower section has been given the name Sron na Ciche; the great precipice itself is unnamed, but is generally referred to as the Precipice of Sron na Ciche.[1] And a wonderful

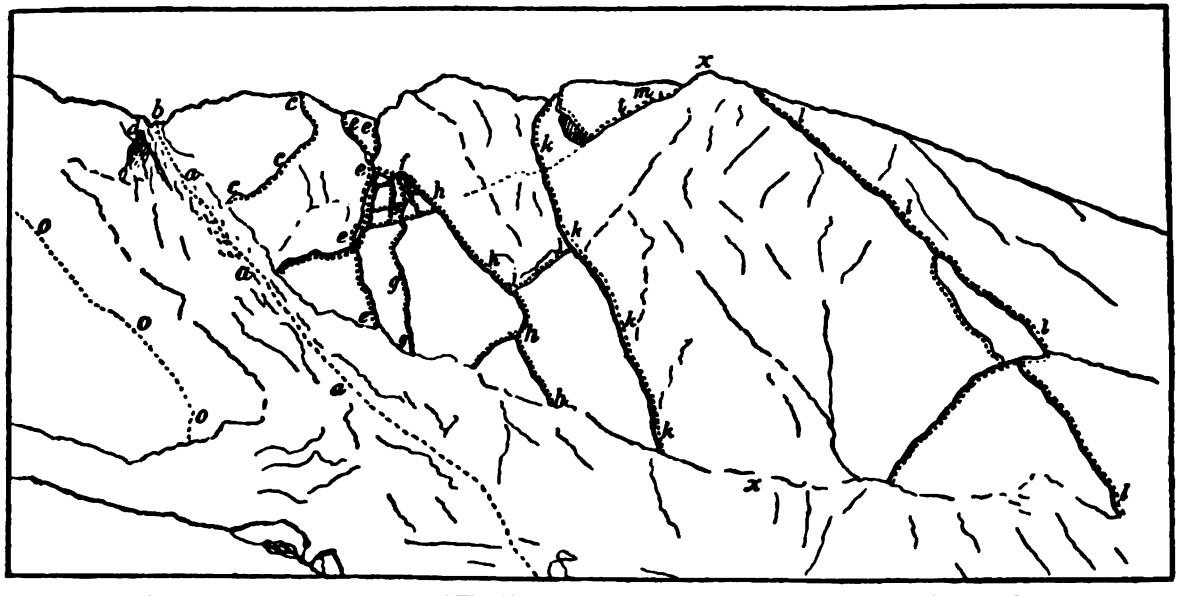
[1] See illustration facing p. 234.

precipice it is! Great slabs of firm, rough gabbro, more than 1000 feet in height from base to summit, are rent near each end by two deeply-cut gullies, and about mid-way by a thin, sloping cleft, which starts at the screes in the corrie and finishes on the skyline. Apart from these three main features it possesses many minor attractions, the most wonderful of which is a pinnacle of rock which juts out of the breast of the cliff—the Cioch (or Pap).

Seen from Corrie Lagan, the Stone Shoot bounds the Precipice on the left. The first opening in the crags themselves is a wide, deeply-cut gully, which forks near the top—the Eastern Gully. This is defined on the right by a huge slab on which, at about mid-way its height, is situated the Cioch. Running down the western side of the Cioch is a narrow gully which terminates in rocks of a comparatively mild angle, at a height of about 100 feet above their base. This is the Cioch Gully.

Forty feet further westward, and almost straight below the point where the cliffs attain their greatest height, is the start of the thin, sloping cleft already referred to. The party which made the first ascent christened it the Central Gully, a most appropriate name. To the right of it the cliffs are on a gigantic scale, and, as yet, no way has been forced up them, until a long, slanting gully, the Western Gully, marks the confines of a rock-massif which in many ways is unique in the British Isles.

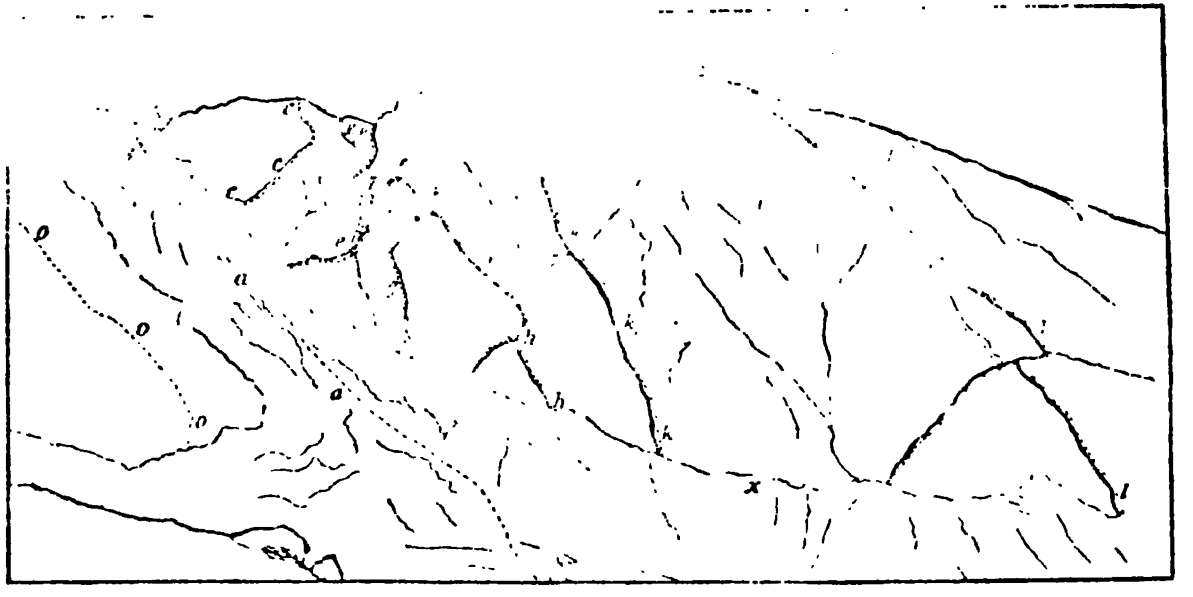
Cutting into the Precipice from the top of the Western Gully is a well-marked terrace or rake.



a Sgumain Stone Shoot.
b Bealach Coire Ghrundda.
c Dr. Collie's Eastern Buttress Route.
d The Ladies' Pinnacle.
e The Eastern Gully.
f The Cioch.
g Climb up the Cioch from the Corrie.
h The Cioch Gully.
j Traverse from Cioch Gully to Central Gully.
k The Central Gully.
l The Western Gully.
m The Finger.
n The Flake.
o North-west buttress of Sgumain.
t The Terrace.

THE PRECIPICE OF SRON NA CICHE

The height from *x* to *x* is about 1000 feet. The route indicated by crosses is the easy way up the Cioch.



c Scam a'n Sgurr shoot.
d [illegible] Pinnacle.
e The Eastern Gully.
f The Cioch.
g Climbers' route from the Corrie.
h The Second Gully.
j The Traverse to the Central Gully.
k The Central Gully.
l The Western Gully.
m The Chasm.
n The Slabs.
o North Buttress (Sgurr a'n Fhidleir).
t The Terrace.

THE PRECIPICE OF SRÓN NA CICHE

The height from *x* to *y* is about 1000 feet. The route indicated by crosses is the easy way up the Cioch.

THE PRECIPICE OF SRON NA CICHE.

A few feet below its westward extremity stands a curious, detached pinnacle of rock which, although on a considerably smaller scale, bears a striking resemblance to the well-known Napes Needle. Beyond this, in the direction of the Central Gully, a great flake of rock has slipped from the crags above, and blocked further passage along the terrace, which continues more or less unbroken, generally less, until it finally ceases on the face about 40 feet westward of the Cioch.

Such is a brief survey of the topography of the Precipice of Sron na Ciche, and having mastered this the climber will be in a position to come to closer quarters, and familiarise himself with the good things with which it abounds.

The Cioch.—As recently as July 1906, this fascinating pinnacle was only surmised to exist. In 1899 Dr. Collie was in Corrie Lagan, and noticed a shadow cast across a great slab on the Precipice of Sron na Ciche. This was the first indication that he had of the existence of the Cioch, but such shadows are apt to be deceptive. The outline of the rock that cast it merged into the face of cliff, and it was not until five years later that he was at liberty to go to Skye and confirm his suspicions. The outcome of his closer inspection is now well known in climbing circles. His discovery and subsequent ascent of the Cioch are the most noteworthy happenings of late years amongst our home mountains.

That the pinnacle so long evaded notice is

not surprising, for unless the sun strikes it at a certain angle it is not easy of dissociation from the crags behind.

A more surprising thing is that the whole face should not have been explored long before 1906. It is the nearest precipice to Glen Brittle, and various possible routes up it occur at once to the close observer; now climbers gaze in astonishment, metaphorically rubbing their eyes and wondering why they never noticed it before. The reason probably lies in the fact that they have started out each day with a definite object in view. The north face of Sgurr Alasdair, the round of Corrie Lagan, or some other favourite course has caused them to hurry past, all intent upon their pre-arranged project, and if they have cast a glance across at the dark rocks of the lower spur of Sgumain it has been unthinkingly and with eyes that saw not.

As far as my knowledge extends, the Cioch is unique amongst our home pinnacles. The Pillar Rock, Scawfell Pinnacle, and others have a short side, which joins on to the main mountain, and which can be attained without any knowledge of rock-craft. With the Cioch things are very different. It certainly has a short side, but to reach it necessitates the eye and route-finding ability of a mountaineer.

Even since Dr. Collie climbed it, more than one party has essayed its ascent, and entirely through inability to find the route, for when found it is not difficult, they have come away baffled and without achieving their object. The easiest way up it is a delightful route puzzle, the solution of which

acquaints one with most of the things that gladden the heart of a climber; gullies, slabs, knife-edges, pitches, arêtes, even a cave to go through, all are in evidence on the easy way up the Cioch.

My first acquaintance with it was made in June 1907. A large party of us had come to Skye, primarily to see it and climb the other courses in its vicinity. To this end Dr. Wallace had brought his motor-car, and it was our intention to alternate between Sligachan and the Cioch, thus combining all the fun of climbing on fine days with the comfort of the inn on wet days and at night.

It is somewhat unfortunate that Sgurr Sgumain is so far removed from Sligachan. Limited accommodation can certainly be had at Mr. Campbell's (the shepherd), but the room there, which is dining-, smoking-, and bed-room in one, leaves much to be desired. The windows were not made to open. As a consequence the door has to be left ajar overnight and complications are likely to ensue. A feeling of oppression on one's chest is not necessarily due to over-indulgence in Miss Campbell's cakes, but may be caused by a rooster, which has called in "to pass the time o' night." The dogs also appreciate the stuffy warmth and stroll in without invitation. Bidein Druim nan Ramh or the name of some other Coolin discharged with sufficiently sonorous vigour has been known to scare them off, but they generally return.

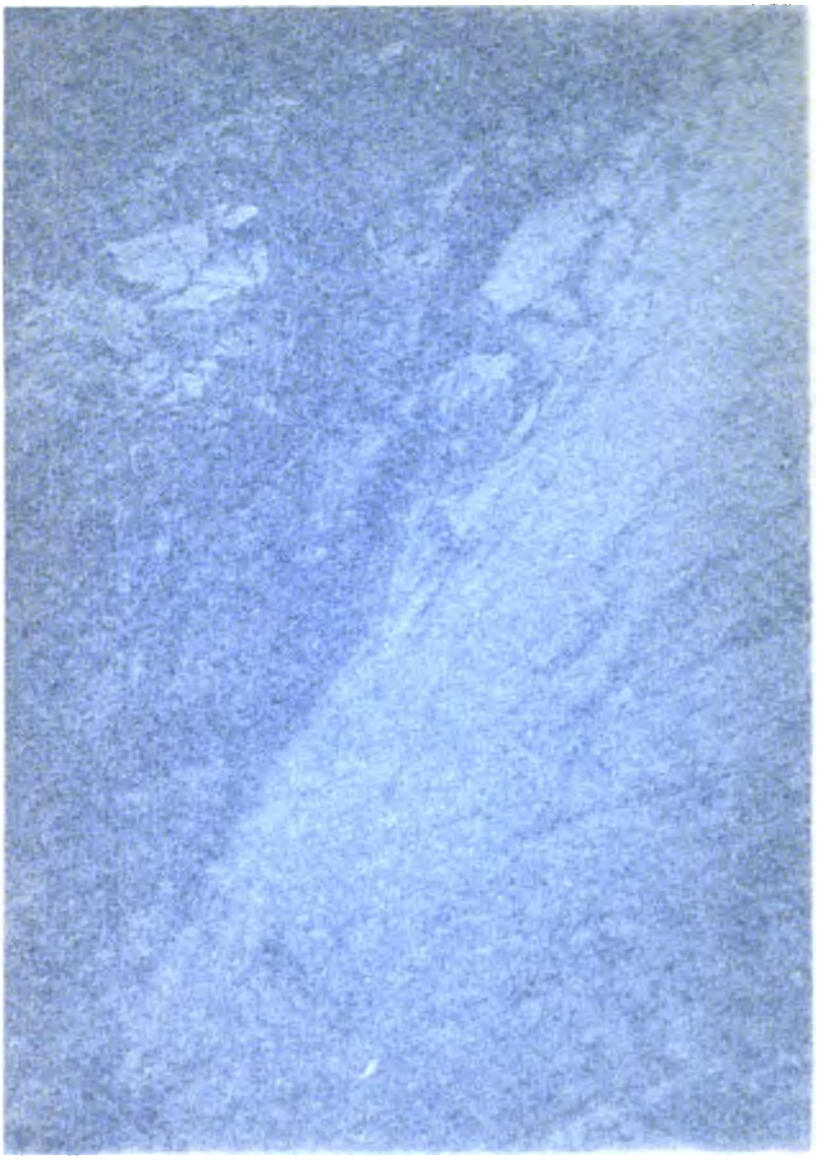
A camp at the top of Corrie Lagan has many advantages, but perhaps best of all is a

motor to cover the long trudge between Sligachan and Glen Brittle. Even this has its drawbacks, and it is only fair to those who may wish to follow our example to warn them that the road was not made for motors. The ruts that run across it may be excellent for purposes of drainage, but their effect on a well-sprung car is apt to be disastrous.

The weather was fine when we left Sligachan, but by the time Glen Brittle was reached the clouds had descended and shrouded all the face of Sron na Ciche. It began to look doubtful whether we should catch a glimpse of the Cioch. However, Miss Prothero, who with Mrs. Colin Phillip made the first lady's ascent, was of our party, and under her guidance we felt sure of hitting off Dr. Collie's route.

We struck the base of the rocks immediately under the Cioch, and then traversed along to the left past the formidable-looking pitch at the bottom of the Eastern Gully. An easy slab on the right soon gave access to the gully, and we traversed into it, well above the first pitch. A few yards higher a ledge in the right wall of the gully gave access to a wide terrace which ran across the face of the cliff. Above the terrace a magnificent slab receded upward into the mist, which lifted almost directly after we arrived. The slab above the terrace was laid at a general angle of about 50 degrees; on its right-hand edge, with clean-cut sides and imposing presence, towered the Cioch.

A few feet from its near edge, on the Eastern Gully side, a deep crack ran up the slab. This was



r[illegible] the long ridge betw[illegible] Sg[illegible] [illegible] Brittle. Ev[illegible] has [illegible] drawbo[illegible] and [illegible] scarcely fair to [illegible] who may wish [illegible] example to w[illegible] them [illegible] ro[illegible] for mo[illegible]. The r[illegible] that m[illegible] be excellent purposes drain[illegible] [illegible] on a [illegible] ing [illegible] s a[illegible]

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[illegible] the base [illegible] rocks [illegible] [illegible] Cioch, and [illegible] traverse[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the formi[illegible] [illegible] to [illegible] [illegible] the Eastern Gully. [illegible]

[illegible] soon gave access to th[illegible] ally, [illegible] [illegible] to it, w[illegible] above th[illegible] pitch [illegible] higher a ledge in the [illegible] wa[illegible] [illegible] gave access to a wide [illegible] [illegible] the face of the cliff. Abo[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] slab receded upwar[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] almost directly [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] above the terra[illegible] was [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] at 50 degrees; on [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] with clean-cut sides and [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the Cioch.

[illegible] its near edge, on th[illegible] Eastern [illegible] a deep crack ran up the [illegible]. This was

THE CIOCH SLAB.

well scored by boot-nails, and was evidently the usual route, although its general trend was away from our pinnacle. We clambered quickly up it until about on a level with the top of the Cioch, where the slab became more broken and the rocks much steeper. The line of least resistance took us away to the left into the Eastern Gully again. We scrambled up this for a short distance until a break in its right wall gave access to the upper extremity of the slab. This formed a rounded ridge of rock which ran slightly downward for about 100 feet until it abutted on the short upper side of the Cioch. The way along the ridge was quite easy, with inspiring views down the great slab, until, after passing downward through a small cave, we were confronted by a knife-edge of rock which, on the left, dipped down towards the Cioch Gully. The passage was soon effected, and thence a short arête of about 15 feet landed us on the wide sloping roof of the Cioch.

It is wonderfully placed, and its surroundings are strongly reminiscent of the rock-scenery of the Aiguilles of Mont Blanc. Here were the same great sweeps of bare, clean rock, the freedom from vegetation, the airiness of situation, the illimitable fields of air and extraordinary feeling of space. True, there was no glacier at our feet, but breaks in the mist disclosed glimpses of a desolation quite as impressive, while out to the west, stretching away to the infinite distance, the endless waters of the Atlantic seemed to touch the same chord that responds to the beauty of sunlit snow and ice.

Mr. Godley's poem describes the situation well—

"We looked from the peak to the limitless distance,
Saw mountain and sea in the rain and the sun,
Tasted the intimate joy of existence—
Labour accomplished and victory won."

The actual climbing had proved easier than we had anticipated, but this was no doubt due to our having hit off the easiest route. It is certainly the one by which all ought to approach the Cioch for the first time.

After photographing the pinnacle, we returned to the neck where the final tower is joined by the knife-edge, and thence down the steep corner formed by the wall of the Cioch and the slab. This gave about 70 feet of really good climbing, and brought us again to the wide terrace leading into the Eastern Gully.

A tour of inspection disclosed the fact that this terrace ran right round and underneath the Cioch, ceasing at a point on the far side, quite near the upper part of the Cioch Gully. It was by way of this gully that Dr. G. D. Barlow and a friend climbed the Cioch a short while after Dr. Collie's first ascent. From this side the Cioch looked very steep, but three or four ways up it have been discovered and climbed.

When I went round to the foot of the slab again I found that my friends had not been idle, but had made a traverse from the corner underneath the Cioch to the crack on the Eastern Gully side of the slab. Their traverse was about 30 feet above the terrace and was not difficult. After making it they climbed up the crack for another 30 feet

or so, and then began a traverse back to the Cioch. After considerable difficulty, and by threading their rope through a small hole they found at the worst part, they succeeded in gaining the neck just below the knife-edge. The slab is set at just the right angle for climbing, and a delightful hour or two can be spent in crossing it in various directions.

It was with great difficulty that I at last persuaded the energetic members of the party to come down and "make tracks" for Glen Brittle. So fascinated were they with the locality that it was not until after midnight that Dr. Wallace landed us at Sligachan, after a sporting drive up Glen Brittle and down the hill past Carbost in the darkness.

The Cioch from the Corrie. — In looking back over a long and strenuous rock-climbing career, the recollections of the majority of my climbs are more or less confused; but out of the tumbled mass of pleasant memories rise up prominently the aftermath of the minority. These are the memories of days on the mountains that come back unbidden, filling one's thoughts with true realism and thrilling one through again with emotions that first occurred long ago.

Among these bulk largely the most difficult and exciting of one's climbs. The wonderful view, the sensational situation, the uncertain tramp home in the darkness, the "happiness that is amongst the hills," all are delightful; but it is the memory of the exceedingly difficult ascents, the moments when the opposing forces were so strong as almost to gain the mastery, that one cherishes most.

And if a spice of real danger, foreseen but judged to be innocuous, enters into such ascents they are all the more vivid in retrospect. The climb up the Cioch from the corrie is the one that I recall as being at once the most exciting, and but little short of the most difficult, in which I have been concerned.

The accounts of the way in which the summit of the Cioch was first gained naturally prompt the question, "Why not climb it straight up the front, instead of wandering all round and then pouncing down upon it from above?"

The idea of tackling it from below seemed scarcely to have been considered, but the second time I saw it I searched for a route direct from the foot. My survey was not encouraging, for, beyond a steep chimney at the bottom, the face looked unbroken, and, as far as I could judge, presented a line of perpendicular rock at a height about mid-way up. I decided to investigate the chimney, however, and see whence it led. Gabbro is a deceptive rock, and its ferocious general aspect often belies the actual hand-to-hand difficulty. When the opportunity came, wet weather had driven away all my friends, except Harland, who shared my keenness and had lengthened his stay on purpose to try what we knew would be a very fine climb if we could make it "go."

Thanks to the courtesy of Mr. Colin Phillip we had spent the night at Glen Brittle, and the stroll to the foot of the rocks was just sufficient to stretch without fatiguing us. Everything was in our favour. The rocks were dry and warm,

and we ourselves had attained to that degree of climbing fitness which is the outcome of three weeks' strenuous work amongst the Coolin; when one can gauge to a nicety the amount of support required for safety, and when the margin of safety, which every climber instinctively allows himself, has been brought to an irreducible minimum. That the imaginary line which divides the dangerous from the safe is placed according to a man's ability has been acknowledged; but I would go a step further and say that the line varies in each individual from day to day. In other words, a climb which may seem very stiff at the beginning of a holiday will appear quite mediocre after three weeks on the rocks. And it is the full realisation of this fact which leads me to think so highly of our climb up the Cioch.

As an earnest of his intention to "win through" if safely possible, Harland erected a small cairn at the foot of the lowest chimney. I suggested that his action savoured of tempting Providence, that our prospective climb was not one which could be taken for granted.

He promised to remove the cairn if we failed, however, so we let it stand for the present.

The right wall of the chimney overhung somewhat, and its general angle was steep. For about 40 feet the climbing was difficult, but at that height the chimney widened, and sent a branch up to the right. This seemed the direct route, but after struggling up it for a few feet it ceased on the perpendicular face and drove us back. The left fork, the true continuation of the initial chimney, led us gaily upward for about 70 feet

until it merged in the impending nose of the Cioch.

We were now immediately below the perpendicular line of cliff I had noticed from the corrie. Slightly to our right the rocks overhung: it did not need a second glance to see that no way could be found on that side. Our chimney still continued straight upward, however, and in it lay our only prospect of success. It was blocked with long spikes of rock that gave excellent holding, but the place was so steep they could not be adequately tested, and so were too dangerous to use. A good belay a few feet up on the right wall rendered their passage safe, however, and Harland, who was leading at the time, worked cautiously up to a narrow ledge about 30 feet higher. Here I soon joined him. We were now evidently coming to something stiff. We were above the finish of the chimney, for, like the fork lower down, it had given out on the face. To the left the rocks overhung considerably, and away to the right also they were obviously quite unclimbable. Immediately above us, however, they looked more hopeful and presented a steep nose of rock, at the top of which there appeared to be a small ledge. Above this ledge two thin cracks, about a yard apart, sprang upward for about 10 feet, where they ceased just below the foot of a short chimney.

Nowhere else was there the ghost of a chance of getting higher, so I stood out against the nose with the rope passed round a small belay, which most fortunately existed, and Harland climbed on to my shoulder. This he soon left, and ere long

attained the foot of the cracks. What had looked from below like a ledge proved to be the sloping top of the nose. Hereabouts the holds were very unsatisfactory, and he stayed for some time.

"Is there no hold inside the cracks?" I asked him. "Can't you get an arm in each and wedge them?"

His answer was sufficiently startling—"Yes; there's splendid hold in both, but I'm wondering whether the rock dividing the cracks is safe!"

Now this stretch of rock was about 10 feet high, and, as I have suggested, a yard across. It must have weighed well over two tons. Surely a man's weight could have no effect upon it. The question was a very momentous one, however, for if it should come away Harland would come with it, and, being directly below, I also would be involved.

"Does it move or quiver at all?" I asked him.

"No," he returned; "I feel sure it's quite firm, but I can't see what holds it in place."

After further discussion we decided he should go on, and if it showed the least movement he was to retreat at once. In the meantime he was to pull at it as little as possible. So, putting an arm in each crack and finding some slight support for his feet on the edges, he worked upward until his head disappeared over the top.

"There are two loose stones wedged against each other in the chimney," he then shouted; "can you move to one side while I send them down?"

This was impossible, but after great difficulty he succeeded in climbing past without disturbing them, to the foot of the chimney, where he got anchorage. It was now my turn. I found the climb to the top of the nose very difficult without a shoulder, and dared not use the rope, for it passed straight down over the two loose stones, an unfortunate circumstance that could not be avoided.

The sloping top of the nose proved very uncomfortable, and the attainment of an upright position required very careful balance. Once accomplished, however, I thrust an arm in each crack up to the elbow. Inside were found most satisfactory holds, but they were both on the questionable rock that divided the cracks; this explained Harland's unwillingness to use them. It really was a tremendous mass of rock, however, and the chances seemed a thousand to one that it was absolutely firm. In spite of this I worked up it, pulling outward as little as possible until I could lie on my chest on its upper edge. Here my actions were much hampered by the two wedged stones that had troubled my leader, and the manœuvre of climbing over them proved one of much difficulty.

Once safely above them, however, I determined that they should not stay to annoy future parties, and asked Harland to hold my rope whilst I dislodged them. They went away at the slightest touch, and then a most nerve-shattering thing happened. They fell downward a short 2 feet (thus they had but little impetus) and hit the top of the mass of rock up which we had climbed. To our intense surprise this moved

appreciably, giving a harsh, grating rumble, and then seemed to remain stationary. Only for a moment, however, for immediately afterwards the whole mass slid down a few inches, and then heeled slowly over. It disappeared from my sight almost without a sound, until it struck the rocks about 50 feet below. The impact seemed to shake the whole face of the Cioch; then the silence was broken by a thunderous crash and roar as it bounded down the steep rocks to the corrie below, leaving in its wake a cloud of sulphurous dust. We gazed at each other in astonishment, not unmixed with awe, and then down at the vacant place. The deafening noise, the clouds of dust, the great ugly leaps the rock took, and the thought that we had just climbed up the outside of it, left us not a little shaken.

But what shook our confidence most was the fact that such a huge piece of rock could fall so easily. Of what use were long experience and precaution if a great mass like that would come down? When could a man count on safety? It may be said that we ought to have returned without trying the passage of that block. Perhaps those who did not see the place, and are thus unable to take into account all the circumstances, will condemn us for proceeding, but it is my firm conviction that any party possessing the ability to proceed would have done so, so great was its bulk, and so numerous the chances that the rock was firmly wedged. The incident goes to show that even on our home mountains, where unforeseen elements of risk are practically non-existent, or at all events can be rendered so by care

and long experience, a real danger may occur which is beyond the ken of one's judgment. "Our best efforts must sometimes be seconded by the great goddess of Luck" has written the greatest climber of all time, a decision endorsed by the above incident. Its value as a warning to others is practically *nil.* It was an "outside risk," and to count on its recurrence would mean the abandonment of rock-climbing. We had learnt nothing; but one good thing resulted—the place was rendered safer and easier for those who repeat the ascent. So much we ascertained before casting round for the continuation of our upward way, although I think it still ranks as an "exceptionally severe" pitch.

A wedged boulder immediately above us next claimed our attention. This was negotiated without much trouble; above it the chimney continued for about 10 feet and was difficult, but proved amenable to a combined attack. It then ceased below an overhanging ledge of rock. There now appeared to be a choice of routes, one straight up and the other to the left, a traverse along the face of the cliff under some great blocks. These were most curiously placed, and *seemed* to retain their position by friction alone. They were of a tremendous size, and we could not gain access to their every side, so of this I cannot be positive. I suggested to Harland that he should climb over one of them and see how they were held, but this he did not seem anxious to do. Indeed, for the rest of the day he inclined to give anything in the shape of a loose block a very wide berth.

We therefore took the traverse to the left, creeping under the blocks, and soon reached a ledge about a yard wide on the sheer face of the cliff. Immediately below us, as we sat on our haunches and gazed outward, was a steep slab which curved over into space. Outlined against its edge were the undulating, glacier-worn rocks of the corrie, half a mile away below us, with nothing intervening. Overhanging our heads, the great boulders formed a rock canopy which projected 10 feet or more. On our right a horizontal crack, the junction between the great boulders and the "live" rock on which they rested, continued across the face. This was the only escape from our ledge, except by the way we had come, so I moved cautiously along while Harland held my rope over a good belay. The climbing was not very severe hereabouts, but was rendered exciting by the exposed nature of the situation, and the doubt as to whether the crack along which I was traversing would eventually land me on the far side and above the great boulders.

Great was my joy when I found myself free from their impending shade, and in a small recess at the foot of two steep cracks. These ran upward for about 30 feet side by side, and were about 6 feet apart. The right-hand crack was the easier at the bottom, but overhung a short distance up. Just as it steepened to an impossible angle, the left-hand crack became less vertical; if an exchange of cracks could be effected it seemed that we could attain their top, where there appeared to be a small ledge.

I called to Harland that I was ready, and he

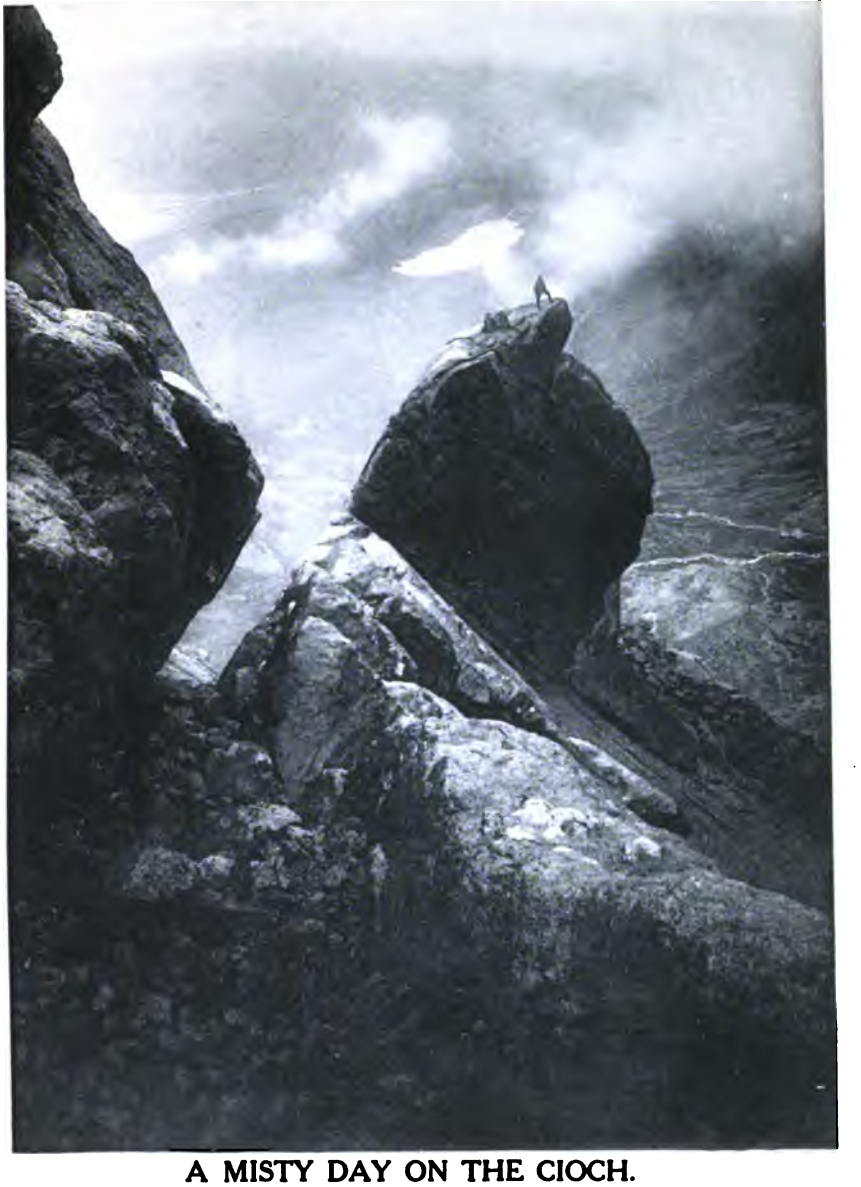
[illegible] sight round the corner, highly [illegible] when he caught a glimpse of the [illegible].

[illegible] simplified matters at the start. [illegible] it be struggled up the right-hand [illegible] about 15 feet, where it became necessary [illegible] over to the companion crevice. [illegible] a very ticklish performance. His [illegible] just reach across and enable him [illegible] the vertical face with the sole of [illegible]. A fairly good handhold for the left was soon found, but directly the swing across should be effected, the push of the left foot would [illegible] outwards and it would slip off, leaving [illegible] by the hands alone.

[illegible] got his left foot and hand across, [illegible] to find a difficulty in making up his [illegible] over. I had him splendidly belayed, so there was little danger, but [illegible] was one of great strain, and I shouted [illegible] to get across before he tired.

"I'm not quite sure that my left hand will hold me," he gasped. Just then his left foot slipped away, thus settling his indecision. All his weight suddenly came on his left hand for a moment, a moment of great excitement. A [illegible] and he got his right hand above [illegible] and was then able to pull up on his [illegible] reaching a higher hold, and thence a [illegible] on the outside of the crack. After a [illegible]" he went straight upward to a sloping [illegible], above which rose a great expanse of

[illegible] few minutes later I was by his side on the



A MISTY DAY ON THE CIOCH.

ledge, breathless after the swing across the cracks. This combined most of the elements that go to form a stiff bit of rock-work—exciting situation, technical difficulty, heavy strain—and above all it was intensely dramatic.

I can recall nothing finer than that rush through the air until the weight was below the support of the left hand; the feeling of exhilaration as the muscles tightened, the joy of mastery as the left hand successfully took the strain, the final struggle upward on both hands, and then the great relief as the tension relaxed and one lay on one's chest in comparative safety. It was a moment of glorious life and exhilaration, a period of intense stress followed by perfect rest and the stern delight of accomplished effort. Perhaps it partook of the nature of a gymnastic feat. Perhaps the joy had nothing æsthetic about it and was purely physical, but what matter? Such moments are good for a man, and the capability to enjoy them in nowise detracts from his power to respond to pleasures which are more cultured.

The slab above us was very rough, but was tilted at an angle of about 65°, too steep to climb without definite assistance in the shape of holds. Fortunately several cracks ran up it, and their rough edges served as a basis of safety for the hands, while the rest of one's anatomy was devoted to making upward progress. A stretch of about 40 feet of very fine climbing, albeit slow and arduous, landed us on a broad ledge, which extended for several feet in either direction.

Immediately above, and quite close at hand, towered the overhanging nose of the Cioch.

Within 30 feet of us we descried the wide terrace which extends from the Eastern Gully to the Cioch Gully. We were obviously above all difficulty, and our climb successfully accomplished. We congratulated each other, and swore it was the best climb we had either of us done, the stiffest, the most interesting. A great content was upon us and a peace towards all men. We would have shed the very clothes from our backs for an unfortunate fellow-man had he come along at that moment and asked for them. True, we should have been but little the poorer, for at the end of a long Skye holiday they would have disgraced the shabbiest tramp! But that is neither here nor there.

A small cairn was built and we hurried to the upper ledge. Thence a fresh route was devised, on the Cioch Gully side of the pinnacle, up which Harland led with the ease that disguises merit, to the top of our "peak." An hour of idleness and retrospect followed, after which we "cast around" for a climb to fill in the afternoon.

CHAPTER XIV

FURTHER CLIMBS ON THE PRECIPICE OF SRON NA CICHE

The Eastern and Cioch Gullies: the Finger and the Flake.—At the present time a climbing party seated on the top of the Cioch can consider a question which is becoming almost impossible of consideration on most of our home mountains —they can discuss which new ascent they will explore. Here the hand of the clock has been stopped, and the climber can appreciate some of the delightful feelings of those early explorers, who looked around and saw rock-climbs on every hand fairly crying out for some one to test their merits.

Even at the end of 1907 the left-hand buttress of the Eastern Gully had not been climbed;[1] neither had the well-marked crack between the Central Gully and the Cioch. The great nose of rock overhanging the opposite side of the Central Gully, about 300 feet above the cairn at its foot, was also untouched by thé mark of a climber's boot-nails. Two narrow cracks about mid-way between the Western and Central Gullies start promisingly, and it is highly probable that if one of these were followed to the point where

[1] Dr. Collie has recently taken a zigzag course across it. (See line drawing on p. 234).

the cracks converge, and the right wall then explored, a route could be found up the crags at the place where they attain their greatest height. This would be a magnificent rock-climb of at least 1100 feet. At the time of writing it still remains to be tried.

It is in accordance with precedent that if a man notices a likely route up any well-known crag, he should lie low until such time as he finds himself in a position to carry out his own project. However, in the case of the ascents outlined above, their accomplishment would so enhance the attractions of this new climbing ground that I must depart from this time-honoured custom, and offer climbers the above suggestions for what they may prove to be worth. I will go even still further, and tender my best wishes for their success. It should be borne in mind, however, that these routes have not been explored or tried at all (with the exception of the crack between the Central Gully and the Cioch, which Dr. Collie has partially descended), and it is my humble opinion that they would all prove very difficult. None but a first-rate party, one of long experience and great steadiness, should attempt them.

After climbing up the front of the Cioch, Harland and I discussed each of these various routes in turn, but dismissed them as being of too great calibre for the latter half of a hard day.

The easier Cioch Gully and the continuation thence of the upper part of the Eastern Gully offered greater attractions; their minor difficulties would, we decided, be quite soothing after the excitement of our late climb.

We accordingly climbed leisurely down the outside of the Cioch to the terrace beneath, an exceedingly pleasant course, over grand rock, whence we crossed to the Eastern Gully, and shortly afterwards gained the Stone Shoot. A descent was then made along the base of the crags until we reached the chimney which is the start of the climb up the Cioch from the corrie.

The evidences of the recent fall of rock were very plentiful. The cairn, built by Harland four hours before, had been swept away, and a great ugly gash in the screes indicated the spot on which the main mass had fallen. After rebuilding the cairn we followed the base of the cliff for about 60 feet downwards, and then struck up a shallow scoop, which brought us into the somewhat indefinite lower part of the Cioch Gully.

The climbing up this was most enjoyable, the rock being firm and rough and the gully quite dry. The general angle was not steep, however, and we moved together up to a peculiar pitch about 150 feet below the top of the Cioch. Here an intrusion of trap-rock has filled the space between the gully walls. This formed a rough staircase that led us upward beneath a block of rock which has slipped from the right wall and formed a natural arch. The "through route" was of comforting dimensions, and we emerged from the hole without difficulty.

A few feet higher a great boulder blocked the gully from wall to wall. The passage of this was rather troublesome, but was ultimately effected up the left wall, which was somewhat smooth and holdless. Above this pitch some jammed stones

were surmounted, after which we struck the terrace, and traversed around a few feet until under the top rock of the Cioch once more. Thence we climbed straight up, the third route we had done from the outside, to the top of the pinnacle. This was traversed to the knife-edge beyond, and then we continued along the top of the great slab to the Eastern Gully.

We were now above the second pitch, and it may be of interest to break the narrative here to mention the two lower pitches. These are unsatisfactory from a climber's point of view. The first one is a long chimney about 70 feet high, normally a waterfall, and composed of somewhat inferior rock. By dint of much standing about on each other's shoulders it can be climbed, but is not to be recommended.

I have Dr. Collie's assurance that the second pitch is quite unclimbable, unless indeed by means of a human ladder or other extraneous aid. The best route to include the Eastern Gully is that by which we had come; the combination of the two gullies, with the Cioch thrown in as a sort of *bonne bouche*, forms a climb of moderate difficulty and great interest, which is sustained for about 1300 feet.

To resume our ascent, the third pitch now loomed through the mist above us, a black cave surmounted by a stone but little inferior in size to that "largest piece of detached rock in the world," in Borrowdale. We scrambled up into the cave beneath it, and then noticed on the left wall of the gully a small foothold. This was somewhat remote, and the handhold between the

gully wall and the stone slightly inadequate. However, a long step upward and across with the left foot landed me squarely on my toe on the hold, and then a trying drag up on the arms brought me to the upper slope of the boulder, whence the going was easy to the top of the pitch.

We were now in a rocky amphitheatre, walled in by most impressive slabs. Masses of fallen rock were strewn about on every hand in the greatest confusion, and the scene of wild desolation was one which I have seldom seen equalled.

A great tower loomed dimly through the mist above us. This divided the gully into two forks, both of such alluring aspect that the climber is hard put to it to decide which to take. We effected a compromise by climbing a fine chock-stone pitch in the left fork and then crossing over a ledge of the tower to the right into what is obviously the main gully. We scrambled upward over masses of great boulders, past a curious cave and pinnacle on the right wall, until our progress was barred by a stone, almost as round as a marble, wedged between the gully walls. A stiff struggle up its left-hand side landed us on the top, only to find that, had we been less precipitate, we might have walked underneath it and out on its upper side.

A few feet higher brought us to the crest of the ridge, which we followed downwards to the right, until, looking over the edge, we descried immediately below us the curious pinnacle of rock known as the Finger. Seen from above the name fits it to a nicety. Its appearance reminds one

most strongly of the bloated, misshapen object which a fortnight's handling of gabbro induces.

We had heard about a hand-traverse which could be made from the neck, where the pinnacle joins the main mountain, to the "shoulder" below its topmost rock, and were anxious to see it. We hurried round to the end of the terrace from which it rises, and thence down to its foot.

On its outside it must be fully 60 feet high, and, as the usual way up it starts from its lowest point, on the side which faces down the terrace, it affords quite a lengthy climb. The route lay up a kind of steep staircase, the "risers" of which were about a yard high. This part was not difficult, and the "shoulder" was attained without trouble. The remaining 15 feet were well-nigh perpendicular, but the holds were excellent.

A rough mantel, not unlike that on the Napes Needle, but easier to attain, was in evidence about half-way up, and the few feet thence to the top were very exposed. The whole structure seemed a little unsteady, and I must personally confess to a feeling of relief when I ultimately found myself on the top and not the top on me. Perhaps our experience on the nose of the Cioch had rendered us nervous, but I confess that I did not relish the upper part of the climb.

We clambered quickly down, then around to the left and up to the neck to inspect the so-called hand-traverse. Like all the other passages that I know which are so described, this was found to contain holds other than those used by the hands. Under a film of white lichen we discovered a small foothold. An upward-sloping

edge of rock could be reached from the neck, and this continued right across the face to the "shoulder." It was rather amusing to remember the energy other climbers had expended in hustling across on their hands, when there existed, just in the right place, an excellent foothold which rendered the traverse fairly easy. The pinnacle is most entertaining, however, and is quite one of the features of the face.

We then walked down the terrace until brought up by the great slab already referred to. This overhangs the upper part of the Central Gully, and rejoices in the somewhat unworthy name of the Flake. We scrambled up the corner between it and the main mountain, against which it rested, to the small cairn built, I believe, by Dr. Collie, on its summit, where we were rewarded by a magnificent view over into the upper part of the Central Gully. After a delightful half-hour's siesta on the top, we crossed the foot of a minor gully and regained the crest of the mountain by way of the ridge forming its left wall. Between the Finger and the Flake various routes can be made from the terrace to the crest of the ridge. These were left till another day, however. A sharp spike of rock had taken heavy toll of my nether garments, and for this reason, as well as because it was getting late and we were about fatigued, we strolled down Sron na Ciche to the plain and thence to Glen Brittle, where we arrived tattered and tired shortly after ten o'clock.

The Central Gully.—The position of this has already been defined. The gully was first climbed in June 1907 by a strong party of cragsmen,

Messrs. E. W. Steeple, A. G. Woodhead, and H. E. Bowron, who, however, did not quite exhaust all the good things it contains, for the wet state of the rocks forbade the direct ascent of some of the upper pitches, which still remains to be done.

My party was staying at Sligachan at the time, and, on our return from Sgurr a'Mhadaidh one evening, I found a note from Mr. Steeple, which contained an account of their climb. So alluring was his description that only three days elapsed before I found myself below the cavernous opening in the rocks, which is the foot of the gully.

A small cairn, which Mr. Steeple told me he had built, corroborated his description of the locality of the first pitch.

The climb started behind a detached mass of rock, and the general angle was steep, but a corner under the right wall brought us without much difficulty to the foot of a pretty chimney about 20 feet higher. Good holds were found inside it, and a stretch of most enjoyable climbing brought us to its top, where it became necessary to traverse to the left to the lower of two bright green patches of spongy grass, that are noticeable features of the climb when seen from the corrie.

About 20 feet above us to the left we saw the fringe of another grass patch. Intervening was a rough slab, which afforded us a good deal of amusement before we attained its grass-covered crest. Above this the gully (the word "crack" better describes it) continued ahead, with

a slight trend to the left, and though never very difficult, the climbing was always interesting to a point immediately below a great vertical buttress, which towered above the right wall.

It looked possible to leave the gully at this point, and traverse under the buttress to the right to some steep but shattered rocks, which seemed to promise a route to the prominent ridge above.[1] We decided to keep straight up the gully, however, and return later to the "variation" should time permit.

Shortly above this point the angle of the gully eased off, and, after having had about 500 feet of really excellent climbing, we found ourselves in a great opening in the crags.

Up to our right a cirque of tremendous slabs came sweeping downward. These were defined on their seaward extremity by the rock-ridge above the great buttress, and then by the sheer profile of the buttress itself, 200 feet of vertical cliff, fine to look at, but quite unclimbable. On the left-hand side of the slabs, the continuation of our gully ran up to a deep notch in the skyline 400 feet above us. Straight over our heads was poised the Flake, its black under side seeming to threaten a descent at any moment. The Cioch peeped through the mist on the face of rock across from us, the shifting vapour causing it to appear at times as if it moved, a weird sight. Everything was on a tremendous scale, and I can recall no other situation, even in the Coolin, where the rock-scenery is so diversified and finely sculptured.

[1] See p. 253, line 16 *et seq.*

This place can be reached from the Cioch Gully, and those who do not feel justified in scaling the lower cracks of the Central Gully can thus have access to this unique rock amphitheatre with comparative ease.

To resume our ascent, we scrambled across to the foot of a steep crack, to which the gully had here dwindled. Down it came a small jet of water, which rendered it desirable to climb as much as possible on the face. This we were only partially able to do, and it was impossible to obviate a wetting. Forty feet higher, the crack became easier and could be climbed with a foot on each side of the stream for some distance, until, above a platform, it again steepened and formed a magnificent 70-foot pitch. At its top was a smooth and rounded chock-stone, between which and the left wall was a narrow crack that looked feasible, had it not been the appointed channel of the water. To-day it was impossible, and there was nothing for it but to tackle a neat little crack in the left wall. Here we came upon boot-nail scratches, which we traced upward until on a level with the top of the pitch, where they led around to the right into the gully. The traverse was short, but contained a long stride that had to be executed almost directly over the vertical pitch, which added excitement to its actual difficulty. Above this the crack became a gully once more and branched into two forks. That up to the left contained a good pitch, but was wet, so we took the other, and, after a stretch of easy scrambling, arrived on the crest of the mountain, about three hours after starting from the foot of the crags. In dry weather

this gully should make a very fine climb, probably the best on the whole face, and one of considerable difficulty.

The Western Gully.—The Coolin are particularly rich in climbs that may be termed "moderate" —those which a novice, if a sound, athletic man, may, in company with a friend or two, safely tackle without fear of encountering anything beyond his powers. On these climbs much rock-craft can be learnt—the aspect of steep places as seen from below or above, the length of one's stride and reach, how to handle rocks and distribute the balance over them, all in fact which a man needs to know in graduating for "difficult" courses.

Of these "moderate" climbs none is better than this Western Gully. It contains a great number of fairly easy pitches, and one or two which, though difficult, are of such a character that the tyro could not well come by much harm on them. And yet the gully is one that should interest any party of climbers that love the rocks and are not constantly on the look-out for climbs that are just within the limits of their powers.

After lunching at the top of the Central Gully my companion and I followed the crest of the crags along to the Sgumain Stone Shoot. This is a tremendous wilderness of boulders and scree, almost as impressive in appearance and as great in extent as the famous "shoot" of Sgurr Alasdair.

On the right as we descended, a fine pinnacle challenged us through the mist. We accepted, and in a few minutes, after an easy scramble, found ourselves on its summit. We afterwards found that this is called the Ladies' Pinnacle (Stac na

Nighinn), in honour of Mrs. Colin Phillip and Miss Prothero, who made one of its earliest ascents.

It was our intention to descend the Stone Shoot and cross under the base of the crags to the Western Gully, but so full of interest is the great wall opposite the pinnacle that we were much tempted to stay and explore it. Several fine chimneys and cracks run upwards, and would no doubt well repay a strong party that devoted a day to them. However, we were anxious to try the Western Gully, and contented ourselves with struggling to the top of a detached slab pinnacle immediately under the wall of the Shoot. About 300 feet below this, Dr. Collie made a route upward and across the buttress until overlooking the left-hand fork of the Cioch Gully, whence he struck straight up to the top of the cliff. This is the only climb of which I know that has been done on this end of the face.

The Western Gully starts at a height of about 200 feet above the screes of the corrie, the intervening space being occupied by a wide extent of steep slabby rock. Several ways can be taken up this, a shallow groove almost in its centre being perhaps the most interesting. This we chose and it brought us out a few feet to the left of the foot of the gully, which, after crossing an easy slab, we soon gained.

The first pitch is a very fine object. The gully walls are about 40 feet apart at the start, and between them is a great staircase of trap-rock, surmounted about 100 feet up by a jammed boulder, which marks the top of the obstacle. Looking

outward from about half-way up this pitch the clean-cut walls of the gully formed huge portals on either hand, which strongly reminded us of Cust's Gully on Great End, only in this case the view through the opening did not comprise a sea of peaks but a sea *in esse*, the blue waters of Loch Brittle and the Sea of Thule, to be more particular. We climbed up the left-hand side of the dominating block, and then over several easy pitches until a fine "50-footer" of the chock-stone variety added interest, and some little difficulty, to the proceedings.

It would be wearisome to mention in detail all the obstacles the gully contains, and would serve no useful purpose. However, just before it forks, about 200 feet below the crest of Sron na Ciche, a good pitch, about 30 feet high, merits special notice. Near the top of it the junction between the gully wall and the jammed boulder forms a right-angled corner which overhangs slightly at the bottom, and, when attained, is somewhat devoid of holds. The struggle up this corner is apt to prove strenuous, unless tackled with the face to the stone, and even then a certain expenditure of energy will be needed. Above it a long scree slope, interspersed at intervals with patches of easy rock, led straight upward to the skyline. A fork of the gully away to the right looked more inviting, and our enterprise in selecting this in preference to the screes was rewarded by the capture of two or three pretty pitches.

The upper part of the gully was first ascended in July 1906 by Dr. Collie and John Mackenzie, but low down they kept to the rocks on the left,

thus missing four pitches. These were climbed shortly after by Dr. G. D. Barlow and a friend, and since then by various parties.

During my scrambles amongst the crags of this fine precipice I carried an aneroid barometer, and the following readings will no doubt be of interest to those climbers who visit it in the future. The Ordnance Survey gives the height of the triangulation cairn near the top of the Western Gully as 2507 feet. Our readings were corrected from this and are as follows: Height of base of crags immediately under the Ordnance cairn, 1555 feet; height of top of Cioch, 2325 feet; highest point of cliff (about mid-way between the Stone Shoot and top of Eastern Gully), 2860 feet. It will thus be seen that the greatest vertical height of the cliff verges upon 1000 feet, while the length of some of the climbs, which generally follow a diagonal course, are considerably more than this.

When climbing on cliffs of less altitude one is apt to think that, as long as the sport is good, a number of short climbs one after the other are all that can be desired. While I have no wish to depreciate the many fine rock faces which range from 300 to 600 feet in height, I must leave it on record that they lack the soul-satisfying qualities of this greatest precipice of the Coolin.

Only on some of the giant peaks of the Alps are such long stretches of continuously difficult climbing to be had; but it is not every one who cares to incur their attendant drawbacks—the crowded hut, the early morning start, the weary grind over interminable moraine

—and these will find an excellent substitute, both as regards quality and length, in the Great Precipice of Sron na Ciche.

Western Buttress — Sgurr Sgumain.—This is the wide, rounded buttress immediately to the left (north) of the Sgumain Stone Shoot. Its foot is about 1500 feet above sea-level, and continuous rock-climbing can be found, over about 1600 feet of rock, all the way to the top of the peak. The angle of the rocks is fairly easy, and by traversing at various points *en route*, the top of Sgurr Sgumain can be gained without serious hindrance.

Those who are anxious for difficulties, however, can easily find them; but it would seem a waste of time in a district so rich in first-rate climbs as this to be struggling up short stretches of difficult rock, when by contouring a few feet on either hand one could walk round them.

The buttress will appeal chiefly to those whose intention it is to make the "round of Corrie Lagan" (the traverse of the ridge from Sgurr Sgumain over Sgurr Alasdair, Tearlach, and Mhic Choinnich to Sgurr Dearg, a magnificent "ridge wander"), for it offers a pleasant route to the top of their first summit, and the climbing is about on a par with what they will encounter on the "round."

The Northern Buttress.—This buttress of Sgumain possesses a peculiar interest in that it was one of the first "variations" made amongst the Coolin. For many years mountaineers were content to follow the main ridge, and leave the gullies and rock faces severely alone.

It was inevitable, however, when the main ridge was exhausted, that climbers should turn their attention to the more minute form of the sport so greatly in vogue at present. I suppose the ridge is the feature that renders the Coolin unique, and will probably always be the object to attract climbers to Skye for the first time, but I venture to say that in most cases their "first love" will be supplanted by an affection for the great rock walls of the corries, and the cracks and gullies they contain. I yield to nobody in my esteem of the main ridge, but, having traversed the best parts of it several times, I must confess to a stronger liking for the great wind-swept hollows—rock-strewn, desolate, dominated by black precipices and crags—which hide below it. To use a musical simile, the main ridge may be compared to some lovely melody, simple, strong, and beautiful, but the corries and their walls of rock are the grand concertos, the fugues, the sonatas, full of wonder and mystery, ever revealing fresh beauties.

From the view of a rock-climber pure and simple the two are not to be compared, and it is pleasing to record that the mountaineers who made the first ascent of several of the peaks should have been amongst the first to appreciate the possibilities of the buttresses which so grandly uphold them, for this Northern Buttress was first climbed (some time before 1890) by Mr. Charles Pilkington's party. It is the well-defined rock ridge, almost in a straight line between Loch Lagan and the top of Sgurr Sgumain. It is bounded on the left by the

mass of scree-covered rocks which sweep downward into Corrie Lagan from the dip between Sgurr Sgumain and Sgurr Alasdair. The rocks of its lowest extremity are perpendicular, but these are turned on the west side and the buttress regained above.

Running along to the right from the foot of this lowest cliff is a line of scree which leads into an oblique, shallow gully or rake. This can be followed upward, amongst magnificent rock-scenery, until it brings the climber out near the top of the Western Buttress, whence the easy ridge of the peak can soon be attained.

The ascent of the Northern Buttress gives about 1000 feet of good sport over clean, firm rock, and is the best course on the upper cliffs of Sgumain. After regaining the ridge above the lowest precipice by scaling an easy wall to the right, it is well defined and full of interest, but not difficult for about 200 feet. Then its angle quickly steepens; for a space the going is more exposed, and demands all one's attention until the top of a subsidiary gully is reached. The ridge then trends away slightly to the west, and can be climbed in several directions. Just before a wide upper gully is crossed, a shattered arête, joining the buttress to the mountain, is traversed until one is under the summit rocks. Then a broad, horizontal ledge leads to the right on to the western shoulder of the mountain; a nice chimney occurs about midway along the ledge, and this affords a pleasant struggle, landing the climber out practically at the top of Sgurr Sgumain.

This threw up a branch to the right which looked stiff. Keeping up the left wall for a good distance, sometimes near the gully, at others well away from it, we at length reached a wide expanse of scree and grass at the foot of the buttress. The climbing up this proved unexpectedly easy; good ledges were in evidence on every hand, and we mounted quickly, all moving together, until the upper continuation of the gully was reached. We traversed into it, and, finding water, sat down beneath a wedged boulder and had lunch.

From here we could look over the intervening ridge of Druimhain to Loch Scavaig and the open sea. To the left Clach Glas and Blaven stood up grandly, capped with snow; beyond them were the mountains of the mainland; peeping up over the shoulder of Sgurr na Stri, Ben Nevis looked as big and massive as I once saw Mont Blanc look from the top of the Matterhorn. Its shape also was strongly reminiscent of its great Alpine prototype. The midday sun shone right in our faces and threw into strong relief the peaks at the southern end of the Coolin.

It was very pleasant up there in the sunshine after two days of snow and storm on Sgurr nan Gillean. It is a peculiar thing about Skye that a single fine day dispels all the disappointment and disgust engendered while waiting for the weather to clear. It is only the net result of a climbing holiday there that is apt to be disappointing. I have often returned home feeling that the outing has been all that could be desired, until I have begun to recapitulate my climbs, and these have,

in many cases, turned out to be woefully few. How woefully few only one who is writing a book on them can know! This lack of a long list of climbs necessitates other visits, however, so there is something to be said for it.

To return to our climb: after leaving the shelter of the wedged boulder we climbed up the left-hand wall of the gully for some distance, a stretch of pleasant but quite easy rock-work, until the south ridge of the mountain was reached, and we found ourselves looking over into Lota Corrie. Straight above us the ridge leading to the summit was vertical, but could have been turned on the left side.

My companions were without previous experience of Coolin rock, and began to traverse round to the left. With the exception of that of the Bloody Stone, which we had climbed *en route*, they had expressed disappointment at the smoothness of the rock, and cast doubts upon my assurances that little skin would be left upon their finger-tips at the end of the day. Now was the time to dissipate their scepticism. After recalling them, I led straight up the vertical nose for about 40 feet to anchorage, much to their surprise. That short stretch of steep rock quite converted them. After being very much impressed with the drop beneath and the excellent holding the rock provided, one of them came up over the edge with a badly cut finger and the other with a lovely rent in his trousers knee—common enough things amongst the Coolin, even after one has, by painful processes, arrived at a proper appreciation of their peculiarities.

A hundred feet higher a wide ledge was reached. Here we built a cairn and then climbed the upper rocks, great blocks and towers of gabbro, hand over hand to the summit. The view was magnificent. From Sgurr nan Gillean to Gars-bheinn, the Coolin were spread before us. Their lower slabs, black and naked, except for the glistening moisture, were dominated by a sharp line of snow, which extended to their summits. Just below An Caisteal this line was intersected by a ragged, triangular wedge of whiteness. A few moments later this had spread to such an extent that the whole landscape was blotted out, and then, within three minutes of the time we had first noticed its approach, we found ourselves the centre of a heavy snowstorm, which soon turned to a raging blizzard. Such a quick transformation is surely but rarely experienced on our home mountains. These sudden storms of the Coolin remind one of similar experiences on the Swiss giants; indeed, these latter can boast but little in the way of weather that cannot be paralleled in Skye.

After following along the ridge in the direction of Sgurr nan Gillean for a few yards, a steep drop was encountered. The snowflakes came swirling up into our faces and we tried the way down to the right, but were soon forced to return to the ridge. An attempt on the Lota Corrie side met with better success, and, after 20 feet of steep descent, a wide platform was reached, which terminated a few yards further along in another steep drop. This could not be circumvented on either side, but after climbing straight downward for a few feet we gained the welcome shelter of a small

cave. Below it the rocks were glazed with ice, upon which rested about a foot of snow. This had to be cleared away and the rock beneath exposed before progress could be made. It proved a lengthy and exceedingly cold job for the first man down. Our quarters in the cave were most comfortable, and we impressed on him the necessity of doing his work thoroughly. The driving snow did not facilitate matters, nor tempt us immediately to follow when he had reached a lower ledge; but there were no signs of a clearance, so we climbed carefully down and joined our friend in the blast. Another short stretch quickly took us to the vicinity of Bealach a'Beoch, whence the sheltered side of the mountain was soon gained. An hour later saw us trudging down Glen Sligachan, homewards, in bright sunshine, with only a white cap of snow on Sgurr na h'Uamha to remind us of the past storm.

Sgurr a'Fionn Choire.—This small peak is one of the few Coolin visible from Sligachan. Seen from the inn, it appears about mid-way between Bhasteir Tooth and Sgurr a'Bhasteir, and, except in an unusual light, seems to rise from the ridge connecting the two; while at other times it can be dissociated from the nearer ridge, and then serves as a promise of the good things beyond it.

A well-marked rib of rock extends from its summit downwards into Lota Corrie for about a couple of hundred feet, and then plunges vertically over to the screes at its foot. An enjoyable climb starts from the base of this vertical cliff, slightly to the right. After about 60 feet of

ascent the rocks become too steep and outwardly sloping for further progress; but at this point a ledge runs round the face to the left to a steep corner, which proves amenable to attack.

Above this the work is typical of most of the climbing on the southern and eastern faces of the Coolin, inasmuch as the dip of the rock is downward and outward, and so the crags can only be scaled where the general angle is fairly easy. The above climb was first done by Messrs. Naismith and Parker in 1896.

Immediately to the right of the base of the vertical cliff is a wide recess in the rocks; on the wall facing Am Basteir, two steep chimneys lead from one tier of the cliff to another, and land one out on a huge slab laid at an angle of about 30°.

The rocks above it are very steep, but a vulnerable point can be found in a corner near its right-hand extremity, which takes the climber upward to the gash near the summit of the peak.

No doubt other climbs could be found hereabouts, but in a district so rich with courses of greater length this peak of the Fair Corrie will not be much visited by the fraternity.

Bruach na Frithe.—Few people, be they climbers or tourists pure and simple, stay at Sligachan for any length of time without making the ascent of Bruach na Frithe. It is the easiest of the Coolin to climb, and the reward attained on reaching the summit is out of all proportion to the effort involved, for in my humble opinion it is the finest view-point in the island.

In itself it is a rounded mass possessing but

little symmetry or beauty of form, but the peaks arrange themselves beautifully as seen from here. Particularly fine is the view southward, for the eye is carried over the lower ridges of the foreground and mid-distance to the dominant peaks of Alasdair and Dearg, the bases of which are hidden from view. Sgurr nan Gillean also, and Blaven, peaks of such fine presence that they cannot be spared from the landscape (as they must be if one is looking from their summits), stand up grandly and help to emphasise the contrast between this mountain land and its antithesis, the level, placid sea.

In a volume on rock-climbing, Bruach na Frithe is an interloper, for it is almost devoid of any claims to a "place." A little desultory scrambling can be had by following the long north-west ridge, however, which leads to its summit from Bealach a'Mhaim. This is the most interesting route of ascent, and in the winter-time or during a snowy Easter good sport can be had. The glissades down its flanks into the head of Fionn Choire are most exhilarating, and can sometimes be indulged in as late in the year as July.

An Caisteal.—That portion of the main ridge between Bruach na Frithe and Bidein Druim nan Ramh is by common consent the least interesting. The traverse of the Castles infuses the only bit of life into the proceedings; with the exception of a short stretch of easy rock hereabouts the north peak of Bidein can be reached by walking.

Some short climbs are to be found on the Coire a'Mhadaidh side of An Caisteal, but the long buttress which plunges down into Harta

Corrie provides better sport. The two prominent gullies, which seam it, still remain to be climbed. A strong party of four, led by Mr. Harold Raeburn, essayed the ascent of the left hand (or southern) of these, but was stopped by a huge overhanging pitch "that appeared impossible."

Retracing their steps, they attacked the buttress between the gullies. Though not steep at the start the downward-sloping slabs soon became so smooth that recourse had to be made to *kletterschuhe*. These were found to give safe foothold for a short distance until the steepening rocks necessitated a traverse to the left and up some rather holdless slabs, which brought them to a point whence the top of the great pitch in the gully could be reached. The buttress promised the better sport, however, so it was followed straight upward, by way of a neat chimney, until the angle of the rocks diminished somewhat.

The going was now quite easy to the foot of the final wall of cliffs, which was riven by several inviting-looking clefts. Choosing the one which appeared in a direct line with the summit, they continued up it until it gave out on the open face. A narrow ridge on their left was then climbed, and this brought them to the top of the South Peak, after having been on the rocks for about four hours.

Mr. W. C. Slingsby, to whom I am indebted for the above description, speaks very eulogistically of their climb. An unpleasant hour my party spent there one Easter, when the lower slabs were coated with a thin veneer of ice, gave me an impression of great difficulty, but on a

summer's day, if one's shoes are "unshipped" below the overhanging part, the climb will be found to be within the powers of a moderately good party.

Sgurr Dubh.—The Great Black Peak whose flanks descend to the western shore of Coruisk in tier after tier of glistening, glacier-worn slabs is the object to which the loch owes half its grandeur.

Although not perhaps one of the most shapely of the Coolin, its great overlapping rocks render it one of the most impressive and easily remembered. From the innermost recesses of Loch Scavaig it looks magnificent and its three peaks show to great advantage.

On September 6, 1874, the late Sheriff Nicolson made what was probably the first ascent of the highest peak. His descent of the Coruisk face by moonlight must always be regarded as one of the finest mountaineering performances amongst our home mountains. The account is long since out of print, and because many have heard of the feat, but have not read the details, his unabridged version of the actual climbing, taken from *Good Words* of July 1875, is appended: "The ascent is a very rough one up the corrie between Scur Dubh and Gars Veinn. This corrie, well named the rough corrie (Garbh Choire) is full of enormous blocks of stone, of a very volcanic appearance, many of them of a reddish colour and cindery surface. About halfway up we were overtaken by a shower of rain, and took shelter for a while under a ledge of rock. When it cleared a little, we saw that the

ridge above was covered with mist, but, trusting in the barometer, we held on, expecting that by the time we got to the top the mist would have passed away, as it did. The last quarter of the ascent was very hard work and not quite free from danger. It was about seven when we found ourselves on the summit, a very narrow, rocky ridge, but covered at the highest point with a thick bed of green, spongy moss.

"We had not much time to admire the view, as the sun had just set behind the black battlements, though we hoped to have twilight to last us to the bottom of the corrie on the other side. It did suffice to light us to the *first floor*, but no more, and even that we found no joke. About half-way down we came to a place where the invaluable plaid came into use. My companion, being the lighter man, stood above, with his heels well set in the rock, holding the plaid, by which I let myself down the chasm. Having got footing, I rested my back against the rock, down which my lighter friend let himself slide till he rested on my shoulder. This little piece of gymnastics we had to practise several times before we got to the bottom of the glen above Coruisk. But there were, I think, two or three distinct floors between the first and the last. From eight to half-past ten we descended, in almost total darkness, for though the moon rose about nine, and we could see her mild glory in the depths below, we were all the way down in the deep shadow of the peak behind us. Most of the way was among shelving ledges of rock, and in one place it seemed to me that there

[illegible]SCAVAIG AND SGURR DUBH.

[illegible] was covered with mist, but, trusting [illegible] we held on, expecting that by [illegible] to the top the mist would have [illegible], as it did. The last quarter of the [illegible] very hard work and not quite fr[illegible]. It was about seven when we found [illegible] the summit, a very narrow, rocky [illegible] covered at the highest point with a [illegible] of green, spongy moss.

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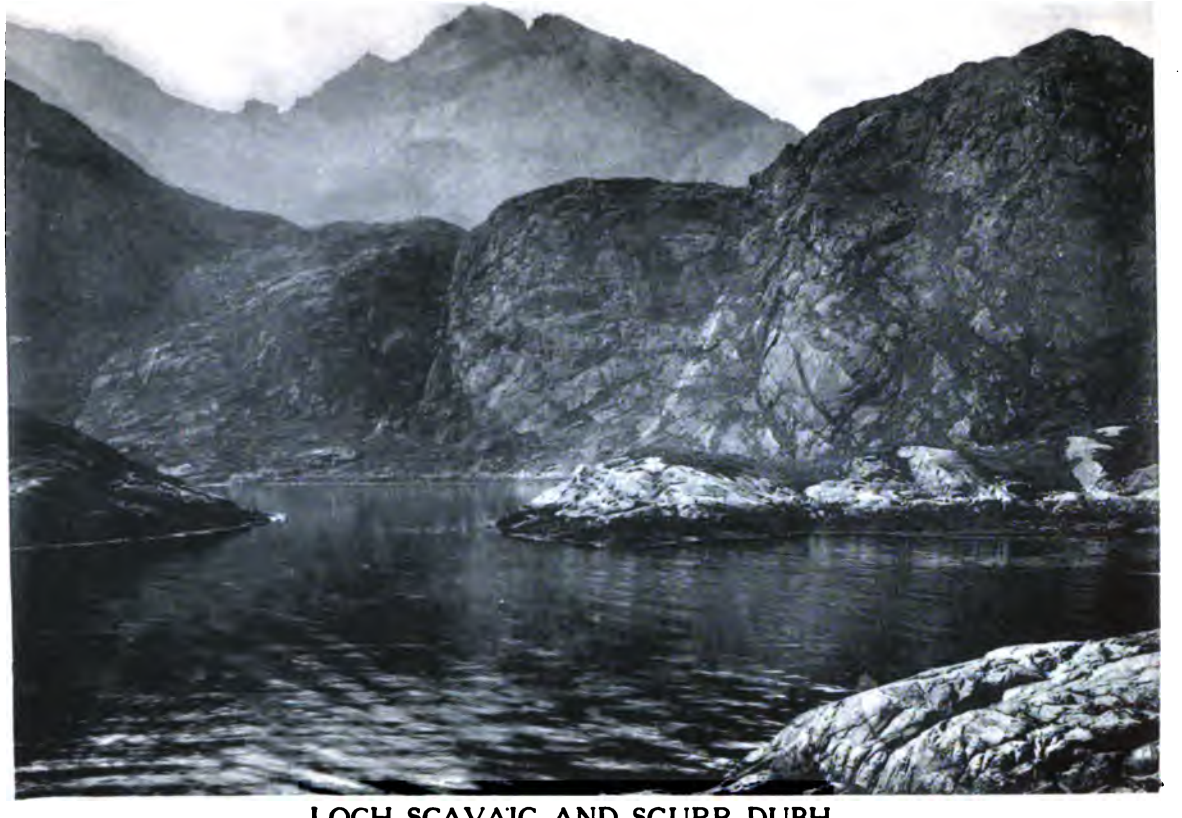


LOCH SCAVAIG AND SGURR DUBH.

was no going further, for there was no apparent outlet from the environment of rocks except down a dark gully, over which a stream descended in a small cascade. The thought of passing the night there was not pleasant, and we tried in all directions before we determined on the experiment of wriggling down the wet rock, in a perfectly vermicular manner, and scrambled round the edge of the waterfall on to something that could be called *terra firma*. I certainly never in the same space of time went through so much severe bodily exercise as in that descent from Scur Dubh to Coiruisg. My very finger-tops were skinned, from contact with the rough-grained rock. But the difficulties of the descent were compensated for when we got, with thankful hearts, into the full flood of the moonlight on the last floor, the valley above Coiruisg."

Its remoteness from the climbing centres probably accounts for the fact that little work has been done on Sgurr Dubh; the traverse of its three peaks, generally called "doing the Dubhs," and the climb *viâ* the Coruisk face, representing the sum total.

Sgurr Dubh Beag is the name of the fine rock-tower on the ridge immediately east of, and about 600 feet below, the highest point. It can be climbed from Garbh Choire with comparative ease, if the line of least resistance be taken, or by way of the broad slabby ridge which starts upward about mid-way along Loch Coruisk.

Standing on the top of Sgurr Dubh Beag, and facing westward to its higher neighbour, the connecting ridge is seen about 90 feet directly

CHAPTER XVI

BLAVEN AND CLACH GLAS

BLAVEN, the great southern outpost of those rounded, granitic masses, the Red Hills, is on the opposite side of Glen Sligachan from the main ridge of the Coolin. Geologically it is one of them, however, and is commonly referred to as a Black Coolin. Nay, more, there are those who consider it *the* Black Coolin, amongst whom was no less authority than the late Sheriff Nicolson. "I have always considered Blaven the finest hill in Skye, and a remarkable example of the value of form, and variety of outline, in comparison with mere bulk, in the production of mountain grandeur." Thus he speaks of it, and later does not hesitate to compare the idea of size that it gives with that conveyed by the Matterhorn or Jungfrau.

Perhaps some of us prefer Sgurr Alasdair or Sgurr nan Gillean to Blaven, so far as beauty of form is concerned; but there can be no gainsaying the fact that Blaven looks higher than either of these, despite its inferiority in actual measurement.

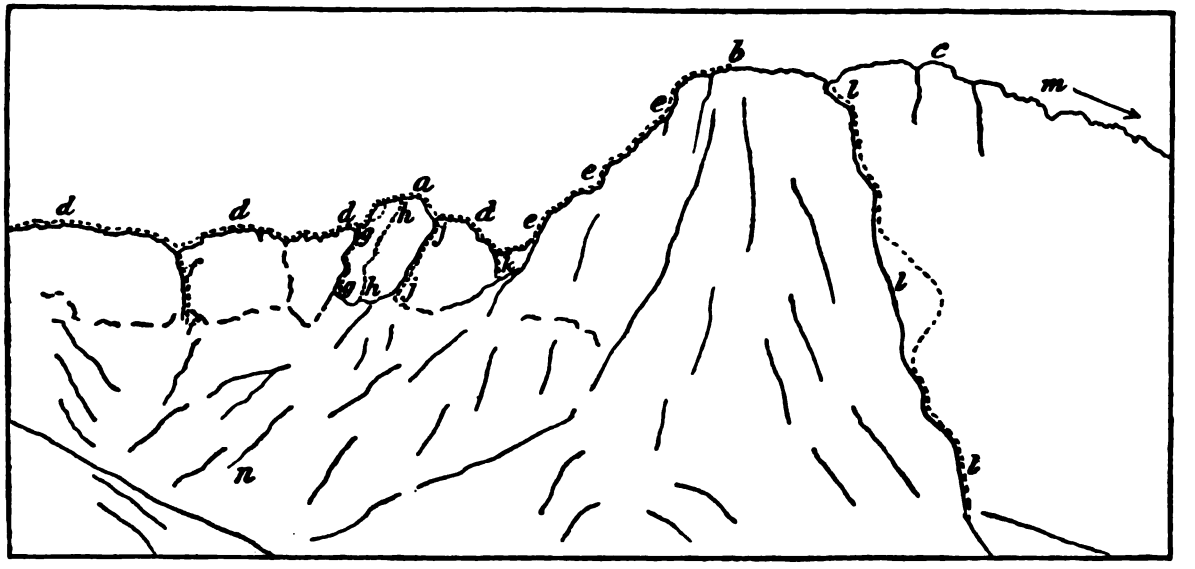
Some people attribute its colossal appearance to the fact that it rises from the bed of the glen in practically one vast wall of nearly 3000 feet. But the real reason is probably to be found in

its peculiar skyline. Running very gently upward from the moor on the south, its long dorsal ridge leads the gaze unconsciously onward and along until it attains its summit. Here the vision cannot immediately stop, but goes tumbling over the steep precipices of its northern end, and only comes to rest when it has taken in the entire sweep of its unbroken flank.

Even when its base is cut off by intervening hills, or when seen from the opposite side—from beyond Loch Slapin — the same optical illusion is conveyed, and I believe that the reason lies in that gently rising ridge and steep termination.

Immediately below its northern face—a perfect maze of shattered ridges and pinnacles—a sharp pinnacled ridge runs northward, over the top of Clach Glas, and insensibly merges into the gentle, undulating outlines of the Red Hills.

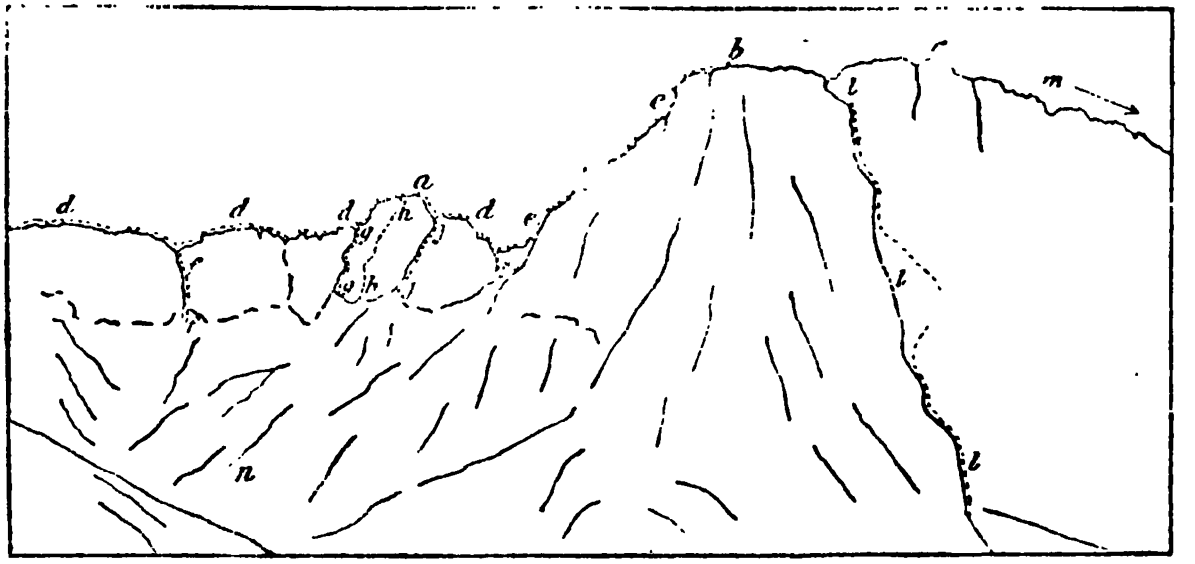
It is a most unfortunate circumstance that Blaven and Clach Glas are so remote from Sligachan. It takes nearly two hours to reach Loch an Athain at their foot, and the way lies down Glen Sligachan, along the stony, boggy, ankle-twisting abomination which, in the neighbourhood, is by courtesy called a path. The above description is applied to the return journey in the evening, and, unless my ears have sometimes deceived me, I have put it mildly! Climbers have been known to compromise by taking ponies down the glen, but, as "Verdant Green" puts it, "except for the appearance of the thing they might as well have walked." For walk they will, sooner or later, and probably lead their pony up



a Top of Clach Glas.
b North Top of Blaven.
c South Top of Blaven.
d Traverse of Clach Glas.
e The Pinnacle Ridge of Blaven.
f The Arch Gully.
g Consolation Gully.
h Mr. Naismith's Route.
i Mr. Pilkington's Route (First Ascent).
k Easy descent to Coire Dubh.
l Long Gully, Blaven.
m Ridge to Camasunary. *n* Coire Dubh.

CLACH GLAS AND BLAVEN

NI LOCH AN



c Top of Loch Glas.
e Lochan of Bleven.
Route (First Ascent).
Corre Dubh.
Ridge to Corrie Dubh.

COACH AND CLAY

CLACH GLAS AND BLAVEN FROM LOCH AN ATHAIN.

to the girths in a bog. In this I speak from unpleasant experience.

Clach Glas and Blaven are more easily reached from Broadford, for a good carriage road runs almost to their foot from that side, a distance of 9 miles. Thence the ascent of Blaven is but a walk up the easy screes of Corrie Uaigneich. Some fine ridges and gullies seam these eastern faces, however, and much good climbing still remains to be done here, but the great mass of the Coolin is inaccessible from Broadford, and climbers will generally tackle Blaven and Clach Glas from Sligachan.

The Traverse of Clach Glas and Blaven is well worth a heavier penance than the trudge home down Glen Sligachan in the evening, for in my humble opinion it provides the finest day's mountaineering in Skye. I use the word mountaineering advisedly, because the man who can start on a misty day at the north end of Clach Glas, traverse its pinnacles and then attain the top of Blaven, without previous knowledge of the locality, is a mountaineer indeed. A rock-climber pure and simple could not carry through such a programme: the art of circumvention—the knowledge of how and when to round the obstacles, instead of climbing over them—is here a *sine quâ non*.

It needs little imagination to picture the failure of a party of climbers without a mountaineer in their ranks. After having wasted much time in "trying back" and scaling steep places instead of obviating them, they would probably find themselves tired and belated somewhere in the

vicinity of the col between the two peaks, when they ought to be on the top of Blaven. In a desperate effort to "rush" things they would then most probably attack the steep northern precipice of Blaven *en face*.

Here we may leave them for an hour or two, and draw a veil over the proceedings. The issue will be pretty certain.

If we wait down by Loch an Athain we shall presently see them emerge from the mist and pick their way in the twilight down Corrie Dubh, baffled and disconsolate, but, like good sportsmen, with an admiration in their hearts for the peak that has beaten them. However, such a party would have little to be ashamed of, for the expedition on a misty day is one of much difficulty.

My own first acquaintance with these peaks was on a fine day, when photography and not climbing was the principal object, so it must not be supposed that the following description implies the success of my party where others have so often failed.

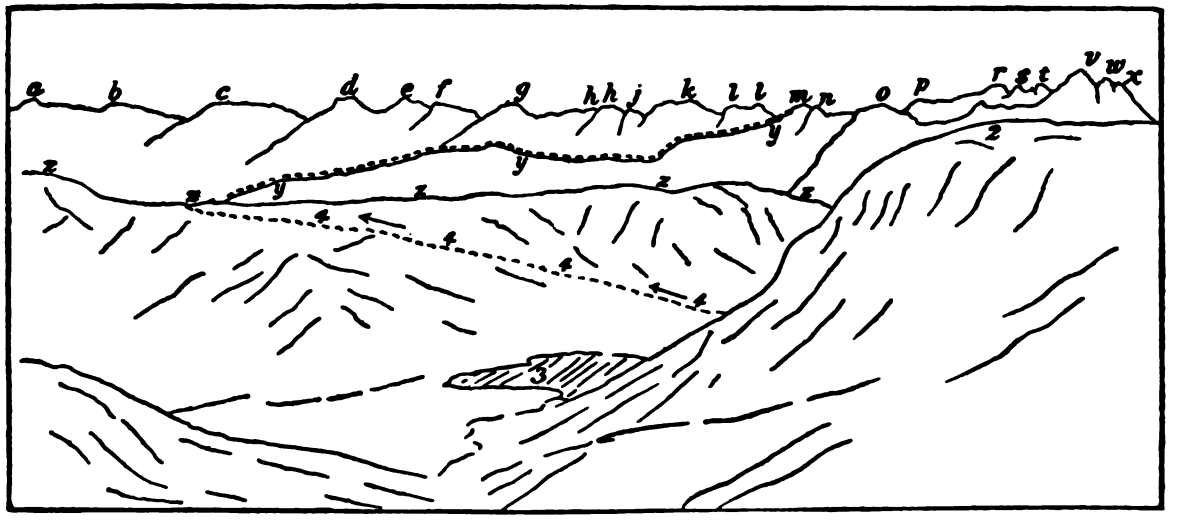
After passing the remains of the Black Hut on the shore of Loch an Athain, we kept to the right bank of the stream along a well-trodden deer-run, and then crossed it, gaining immediately the snout of the steep vegetation-grown moraine in the centre of Corrie Dubh. This corrie is also known as Stony Corrie, a somewhat ironical name when one knows that it is one of the few grassy retreats in the Coolin. Garbh Corrie, Corrie Labain, or Ghrundda would have carried the name off better.

The going was steep, and we quickly rose

above the opposite ridges of Druimhain and Druim nan Ramh, beyond which the southern peaks of the main ridge stood up grandly.

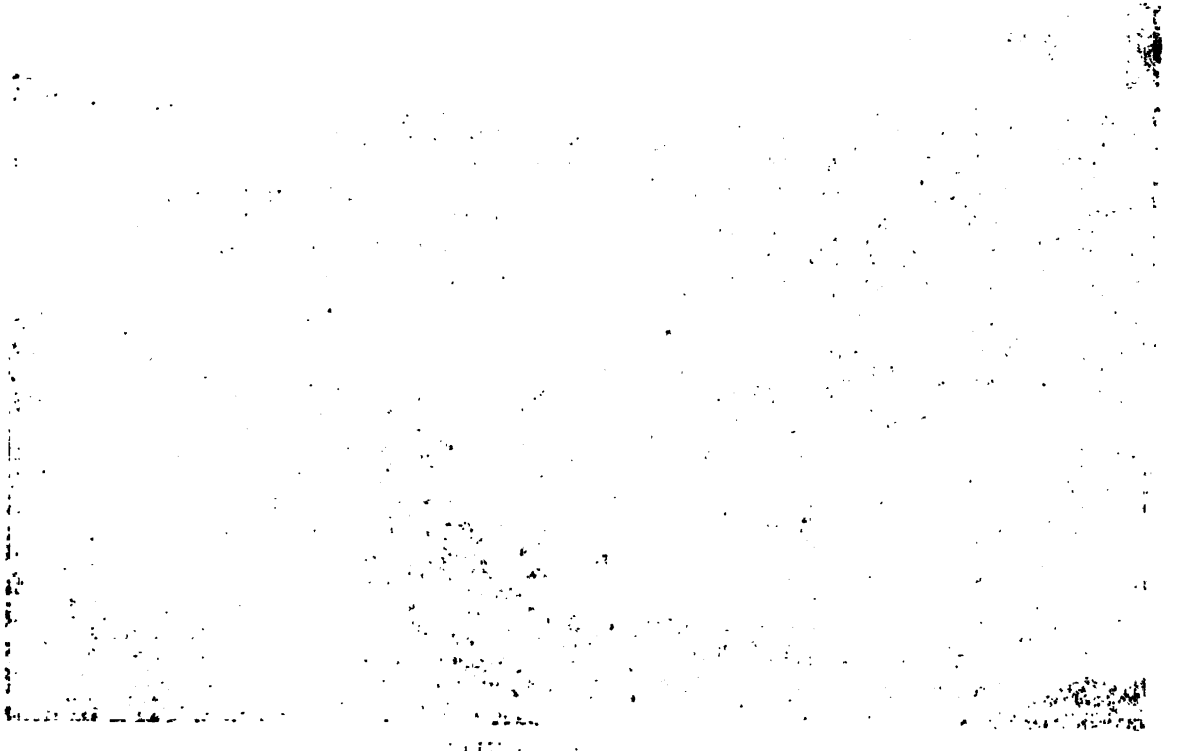
After about an hour's walk from the glen, we attained the foot of the broken rocks at the northern end of Clach Glas. Whilst resting here and identifying the various peaks of the Coolin across the valley, all of them, from Sgurr nan Gillean to Gars-bheinn, being now in view, our attention was arrested by a shrill scream above our heads. Looking up we saw two birds, an eagle and a carrion crow, circling around and chasing each other. They were having a great game together, and the eagle screamed with delight. After we had watched them for a few minutes the eagle evidently forgot its manners, for Mr. Crow shed a few feathers, gave a hoarse croak, and flew straight off home to Harta Corrie in high dudgeon, having no doubt been nipped by the bigger bird. And now we beheld a wonderful sight. The eagle soared upward until it became but a small speck in the ether, and then, with wings close-folded round its body, fell like a stone to within a short distance of us, when it spread its pinions and wheeled half-way across the corrie with terrific impetus. For quite a long time it entertained us in this manner, and then sailed slowly over the crest of Blaven, disappearing from sight to the accompaniment of our applause. It was a wonderful performance, "staged" to perfection.

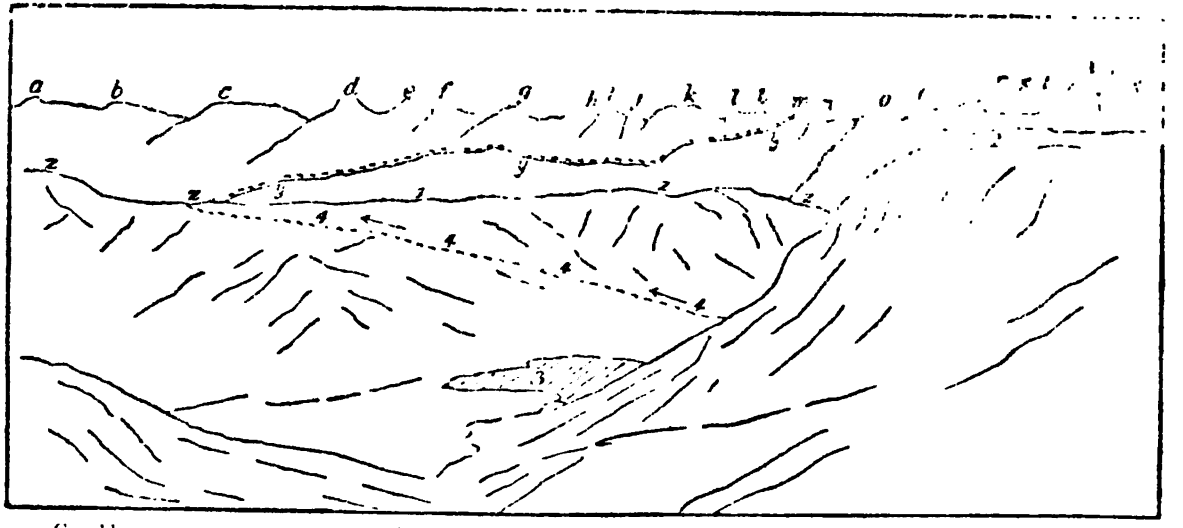
The usual way of gaining the northern end of the Clach Glas ridge lies up the broken rocks immediately to the right of the scree shoot, but



a Gars-bheinn.
b Sgurr a'Choire Bhig.
c Sgurr nan Eag.
d Sgurr Dubh Mor.
e Sgurr Alasdair.
f Sgurr Mhic Choinnich.
g Sgurr Dearg.
h Sgurr na Banachdich.
j Sgurr Thormaid.
k Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh.
l Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.
m Bidein Druim nan Ramh (Central Peak).
n Bidein Druim nan Ramh (North Peak).
o Sgurr na h'Uamha.
p An Caisteal.
r Bruach na Frithe.
s Sgurr a'Fionn Choire.
t Am Basteir.
v Sgurr nan Gillean.
w Knight's Peak, Sgurr nan Gillean.
x Third Pinnacle, Sgurr nan Gillean.
y Druim nan Ramh.
z Druim Hain.
2 Ruadh Stac. 3 Loch an Athain.
4 Path from Sligachan to Coruisk.

THE COOLIN FROM CLACH GLAS





a Gars-bheinn.
b Sgurr a'Ghoire Bhig.
c Sgurr nan Eag.
d Sgurr Dubh Mor.
e Sgurr Alasdair.
f Sgurr Mhic Choinnich.
g Sgurr Dearg.
h Sgurr na Banachdich.
j Sgurr Thearlaich.
k Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh.
l Sgurr a Mhadaidh.
m Bidein Druim nan Ramh (Central peak).
n Bidein Druim nan Ramh (North Peak).
o Sgurr na h-Uamha.
p An Caisteal.
r Druim na Feithe.
s Sgurr a'Fionn Choire.
t Am Basteir.
u Sgurr nan Gillean.
w Knight's Peak, Sgurr nan Gillean.
x Third Pinnacle, Sgurr nan Gillean.
y Druim nan Eachan.
z Druim Hain.
a Inaccessible Pinnacle. 3 Loch an Athain.
4 Path from Sligachan to Glen Brittle.

THE COOLIN FROM CLACH GLAS

THE RIDGE OF THE COOLIN FROM CLACH GLAS.

a more interesting route is that up the Arch Gully, the most northerly rift in the west face of Clach Glas. This is not difficult, but a big chock-stone pitch about half-way up lends distinction to the scramble. A fine cave beneath the dominant block is easily gained, and then a narrow ledge leads outward along the vertical left wall of the gully; from this the top of the pitch can soon be reached. Higher up two or three short pitches are encountered, and when above these a very fine rock arch is passed under, the crest of the ridge being then but a few yards away. At this point the ridge proper begins.

The rock is splendidly firm, and we made quick progress, sometimes clambering over sundry small pinnacles, at others turning them on the Glen Sligachan side, until, after rounding a steep wall of rock, we came suddenly into full view of the upper peak of Clach Glas.[1] This has been called the "Matterhorn of Skye," and, as far as outline alone is concerned, the name is not inapt. Though on a comparatively small scale, it is a very fine object, and, as an example of an isolated mountain-top, would be difficult to surpass. In front of it were two fine towers, which helped to "throw up" and emphasise the boldness of the highest peak.

We passed along the right-hand flanks of the two intervening towers (they are sometimes traversed), and reached a wide scree-filled gully.

The usual way from here is up an unmistakable branch gully running up the wall on the right. This lands the climber out on the sloping roof

[1] See Frontispiece.

of the peak, whence splintered and broken rocks lead into a deep rock "crevasse," through which he can squeeze sideways. If he has no "sideways," he can pass round to the right. From the upper end of the crevasse an easy scramble takes him upward to the long, moss-carpeted ridge which is the summit of Clach Glas.

With this "ordinary" route we were already acquainted, so we kept up the screes to the top of the gully, to see if a way could be forced straight up the final tower. Our inspection showed us that for 30 feet or so the rocks were vertical.

They provided fair holds, however, and after a really good stretch of climbing we attained a scree-covered ledge, which led us to the foot of a steep chimney. Its interior rocks were somewhat loose, so we traversed a yard or so to the right, arriving at an exposed corner. A good belay rendered its passage safe, and once round it a higher anchorage was soon reached. A 20-foot slab, with a deep crack running up its centre, then presented itself for our delectation. Its ascent engrossed the whole attention; from its upper edge we stepped on to the northern end of the summit ridge, well pleased with our innovation, which ought to become popular.

The top of Clach Glas is an ideal place on a fine day; it is to be feared that its comfortable mosses and magnificent views are answerable for much squandered time. But what matter traversed ridges and a completed programme, compared with the happiness of an hour or two in such a place? I well remember two hours of idleness I

once passed in a hot sun gazing round in all directions—on the grim northern face of Blaven, the whole range of the Coolin across the glen, with MacLeod's Tables peeping over the flank of Sgurr nan Gillean, the varicoloured rounded masses of the Red Hills shimmering through the heat, the distant mountains of the mainland, Loch Slapin almost at my feet, and the sea receding away to the distant Outer Hebrides—and count those two hours well spent.

From the top of Clach Glas the ridge is fairly level for some little distance, and we clambered gaily along until a vertical precipice plunged over and stopped direct progress. The continuation of our ridge lay below us to the left, so we followed along the top of the cliff and down an easy slab, whence a short climb down some "trap" rock brought us to it. After scrambling along for a few feet we looked back, and saw that our way had lain along the top of what Mr. Charles Pilkington has called the "impostor," a perpendicular face of rock verging on 100 feet in height.

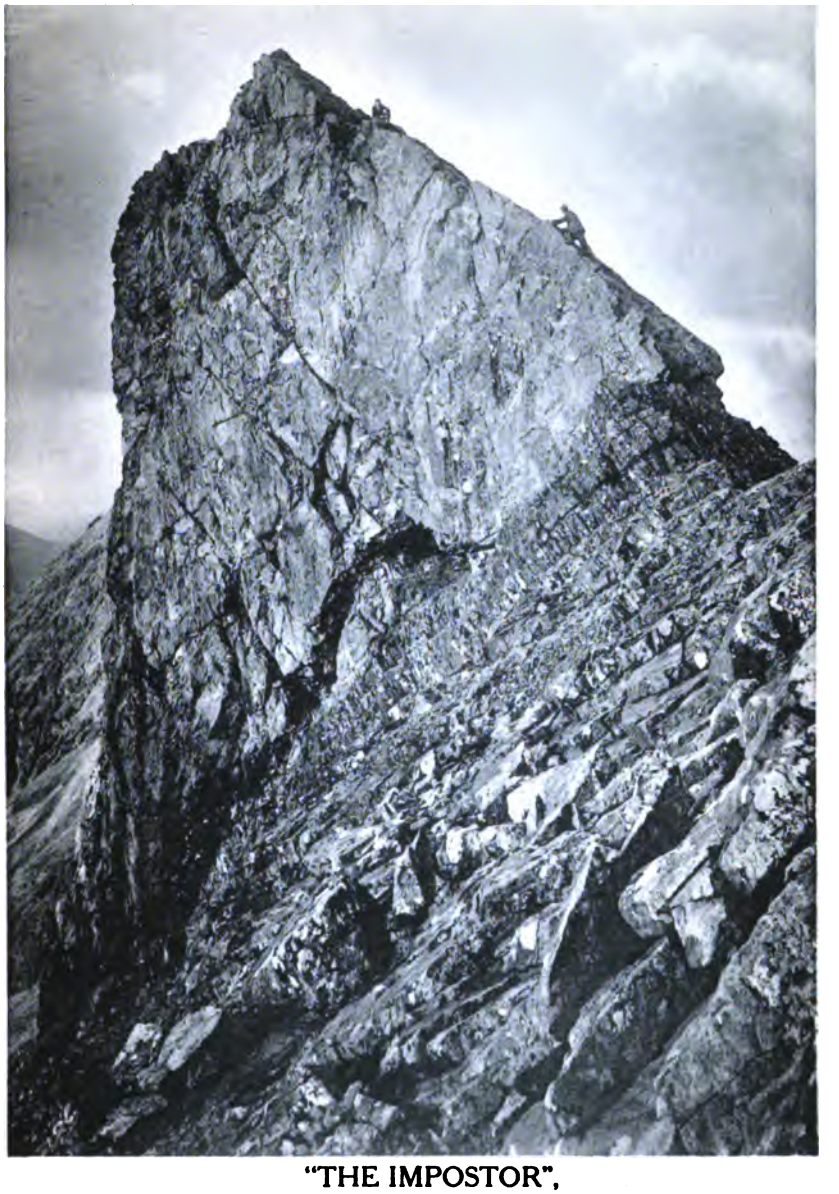
When the first ascent of Clach Glas was made (in May 1880), Mr. Pilkington's party gained our present position by way of the easy gully leading from Coire Dubh. His description then reads as follows: "Gaining the upper ridge to the right or south side of the actual summit, we found a knife-edge of tremendous steepness coming down towards us. We put on the rope and nerved ourselves for the attack; we just had a look round the edge first, and seeing a piece of slanting rock, we crossed it, and pulling ourselves out of the

neck of a little gully, walked up the impostor in a few minutes."[1]

For some little distance our ridge was now easy, and we made good pace until the crest of another vertical cliff was reached. Such places must be very disconcerting in a thick mist, for they seem to occur without "rhyme or reason," and with a suddenness that is positively startling. This time we clambered down to the right into a steep gully containing a pitch that was not easy to descend. Once down it, however, a traverse to the left again brought us to the ridge, below the steep drop. Somewhat the same tactics were resorted to at other steep places we encountered (the easiest way onward generally led us across the faces overlooking Loch Slapin), and after rounding a rock-tower we at length stood on the level space known as the Clach Glas-Blaven Col. We had taken two and a half hours from the foot of the Arch Gully, and had wasted no time. For those who are wishful to escape home from this point an easy scree-gully leads down into Coire Dubh.

Immediately facing us was a steep wall about 15 feet high. We had heard of this *mauvais pas*, and expected a little mild excitement. As a matter of fact the holds on it were excellent, and its ascent proved unexpectedly easy. Above it a great scree-floored amphitheatre was reached. This is the place where the ultra-gymnasts come to grief. Straight ahead was a seductive-looking precipice, up which lay undoubtedly the nearest way to the top of Blaven. Considered as a means

[1] *Alpine Journal*, vol. xiii. p. 445.



"THE IMPOSTOR",
THE TOP OF CLACH GLAS FROM THE SOUTH.

of quick progress, it possesses a very serious drawback, however; in climbing parlance, "it won't go." *If* a party succeeded in scaling it they would find themselves on a very fine pinnacle, the top of which is separated from the easy upper slope of Blaven by a cleft, across which a man can almost, but not quite, jump; but of this pinnacle more shortly.

The usual route from the top of the screes above the "15-foot wall" lies along the base of the precipice to the right. After proceeding a few feet we passed a small cairn near the foot of a steep chimney. Beyond this we turned sharply to the left up a scree-shoot, and found ourselves in an enclosed space, with cracks, gullies, scree-shoots, and shattered crags on all sides. The recesses of this northern declivity of Blaven are wonderfully desolate and intricate.

From our present position a choice of two routes offered itself. One of these leads slightly downward and then across the top of a chock-stone pitch—a long stride into a huge scree-gully with perpendicular sides. This gives out on the eastern slopes of Blaven, where stands a small cairn, above all difficulty.

Another route, the one usually taken, is up a boulder-filled chimney straight ahead. This gives a nice climb, and takes one into the upper part of the wide scree-gully. Before climbing this chimney we descried up to our left the pinnacle already mentioned, and hurried up the narrow gully that led to the neck between the pinnacle and the vertical wall of the mountain, intending to scale the former. This proved no easy matter.

The holds at first were almost non-existent, and the face of the pinnacle was very steep. A long step up to the left brought a decent handhold within reach, however, and a somewhat trying drag upward over the crest of the wall landed me on a slab of easy inclination, which led to the top. Here we foregathered and some built a cairn, whilst the others discussed the possibility of jumping across the gap on to the mountain. It was agreed that the safer way lay down the pinnacle again and round by the usual route! After regaining the neck another way was made up the pinnacle from its western edge, a really tough bit of work. To parties with plenty of time in hand these short climbs are well worth doing.

The day was now well advanced, so, after re-descending the pinnacle, we backed up the orthodox chimney, and across to the great scree-gully, whence ten minutes' walk brought us to the north (the highest) top of Blaven.

Many people consider the view from here the finest in Skye, and it certainly is magnificent, but it seems to me that the best view in Skye should have Blaven in it. However this may be, a great number of those who have seen this prospect have been moved to write about it; *scribendi furore* has "laid them by the heels." Wherefore I owe them a grudge, for I should much have liked to describe it myself! *Pereant qui nostra antea dixerunt!* My readers are respectfully referred to the two illustrations taken from Clach Glas,[1] which might have been taken from Blaven, so alike in outlook are these two peaks.

[1] Facing pp. 290 and 308.

After passing the time of day with many old friends on the main ridge of the Coolin, and greeting some of the mainland peaks, we descended to the gap between the north and south peaks. This is the top of the long gully leading down the west face of Blaven to Glen Sligachan. From the glen this looks as though it might contain good climbing, but that afternoon we found that it was chiefly remarkable for a vast amount of ankle-twisting scree, and a pitch that we had to circumvent on the left side. It provides a quick way down, however, and thanks in great measure to it we arrived at the inn about nine o'clock, which is really quite early after the traverse of Clach Glas and Blaven.

The Pinnacle Ridge of Blaven, and Consolation Gully, Clach Glas.—Most climbers are content to devote but one day of their stay at Sligachan to Clach Glas and Blaven. This spirit of contentment is emphasised, if indeed it is not altogether actuated, by remembrance of their trudge along Glen Sligachan. As a matter of fact their aversion to this particular form of exercise causes them to take the right course, which is to devote the rest of their time to the peaks of the main ridge, in spite of the seductive-looking cliffs of the northern end of Blaven. Such, at least, is my humble opinion.

In happy ignorance of the potentialities of these cliffs, and in part persuaded by an account we had read of the Pinnacle Ridge of Blaven, a party of four of us set out one morning intent upon their investigation. The ridge in question is not easy of identification, but the day was clear, and we

had with us an outline drawing of it in the current number of the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*. Wherefore we arrived at its foot without delay, confident that we had found the right place. The ridge is seen in profile from the north end of Loch an Athain; for the assistance of future parties we built a cairn at its foot.

The lowest cliff is a rounded buttress about 200 feet high and of great steepness. An attempt to scale this straight up was but a qualified success. In other words, we climbed about 30 feet of vertical rock, a really nice stretch, and were then forced away to the right flank of the rampart into a shallow groove, up which we scrambled without difficulty until its top was reached.

Easy screes then led us round to a wide terrace, above which the rocks of the ridge continued mildly ahead. All moving together we jogged comfortably upward, wondering when we were coming to the climbing, when once more we brought up on a wide terrace.

Here a rude shock awaited us. The angle of the ridge ahead became easier than ever; it was intersected at various places by several ledges, which were led into by sundry scree-shoots. Moreover, the rock had become very loose and unreliable, and a great tower high above us looked too steep to be climbed. Was it for this we had reserved the finest day of our holiday?

We pulled out our *Journal* to see what it had to say for itself, and then, to our horror, found that the ascent described therein had been made under "wintry conditions"! "Frost crystals had thickly encrusted the rocks," and no doubt caused

trouble and given sport where, under normal conditions, none existed.

Thereafter our doings are no more worth chronicling than those already described! To make a long story short, we found several nice traverses and cracks away on the cliffs to the left of the Pinnacle Ridge, and returned to it at the foot of the tower mentioned above. We made a route up this on its western (right-hand) side, which was amusing, but too indefinite for description, and, shortly after, arrived on the top of Blaven. All of which may be taken to emphasise the remarks which preface this section.

It was already getting late, so we rattled down the wide scree-shoot leading to Coire Dubh, where we sat down and admired the great tower of Clach Glas opposite.

Whilst so doing, our attention was arrested by the black gully which runs up immediately to the north of the highest tower.

"Has it ever been climbed?" some one asked. No record had been seen of an ascent of it, so two of us, prompted mainly by curiosity, raced across the intervening screes and up to its foot.

A glance at the first pitch sufficiently explained why no record existed of the ascent of the gully; a more ugly-looking customer I have seldom seen. The walls, about 3 yards apart, were thickly coated with wet moss. About 40 feet up was jammed between them the lowest of a mass of great boulders, which impended over our heads for several yards and dripped moisture. The whole structure was about 100 feet high and absolutely unscalable. I cheerfully undertake the

responsibility of my rashness in making such a statement!

Fate seemed dead against us that day, when I espied, running up a corner to the left of the main channel, a narrow gully containing three nice chock-stone pitches. Above these, it bent away to the right and appeared to lead round to the top of the main gully.

It was already beginning to get dark, however, and I took it for granted we would leave it for another day. Not so my friend, however. He had the rope on in a trice, and had struggled up the first pitch. He pointed out that he needed consolation for a day of disappointment, that he was determined to climb this gully, even if he had to do it alone, and that if he climbed it by himself he would most probably come to grief! Wherefore, it behoved me to follow—mad as the project appeared.

The walls of the gully, smooth and holdless, were about a yard apart, and lent themselves to backing-up methods. The three pitches, all of them beauties, were surmounted in this manner, and from the topmost we were able to peep round the corner on the right into the main gully. Looming through the increasing darkness we saw a second pitch, two or three degrees more ferocious in aspect than the one below it. Like a certain Scotsman we felt we would "fain be itherwhere," so withdrew our heads and continued up the Consolation Gully. Another short pitch brought us to the foot of a steep right-angled groove, across the top of which was wedged a great rounded boulder. We backed

up to the cave below this, and here found good anchorage. It proved feasible to work outward, and then up the corner formed by the junction of the boulder with the wall of the groove—30 feet of irreproachable climbing, rendered quite difficult by the fact that the holds had to be felt for rather than seen. This brought us out to the main gully above the pitches.

We scrambled in almost total darkness up the screes, until immediately below the final tower of Clach Glas, and then turned sharply to the left and along by the usual way to the north end of the ridge. Over the rest of the proceedings a veil may well be drawn. "There be some sports are painful," and this day of disappointments has already run to too great a length.

The West Face Climb of Clach Glas.—The dip of the slabs of the Coolin is towards the centre of the gabbro area, roughly towards Loch Coruisk. This simple geological fact accounts for the outwardly sloping holds that trouble the climber on the buttresses and faces of the eastern flanks of Sgurr Dubh, and the peaks northward to Bruach na Frithe. Clach Glas is on the opposite edge of the gabbro area, and, as a consequence of this, its west face is formed of overlapping, laminated slabs (generally called "boiler-plates"), which shelve down towards Coire Dubh.

Undeterred by their forbidding aspect and geological shortcomings, Messrs. W. W. Naismith and J. A. Parker tackled these slabs from their lowest extremity, and succeeded in making a direct route up them to the top of Clach Glas. This was in 1896; since that time many parties

have repeated their climb, finishing the traverse southward along the ridge to Blaven, a course which is to be recommended in preference to the usual route from the col between Garbh-Bheinn and Clach Glas.

From the right-hand grass patch at the base of the rocks, the route goes up steep slabs, bearing slightly to the left all the way, until a wide outward-sloping rock-terrace is reached. This is grass- and scree-covered, and is about 100 feet up the face. Immediately above it is a slab, at the upper end of which is a steep rectangular rock-corner: this is the crux of the climb. Once above it, the going becomes easier; broken rocks and sundry easy slabs and cracks take one over a variety of routes to the top of the peak.

Below the steep corner a traverse can be made to the right to an easy 30-foot chimney. From the top of this the face can be crossed to the south, past the foot of a fine chimney, which ought to be climbed, and thence round the lowest point of the "impostor" to the easy ridge beyond.

In looking at Blaven from here the climber will be impressed by the tremendous walls of pinnacled cliff running downward to the left. The skyline of this has been climbed throughout, the lowest tower—about 100 feet high—and the passage from it to the next tower, affording good sport.

The eastern face of Clach Glas was climbed by Dr. Inglis Clark, by a somewhat involved route. This represents all the climbing that has been done here, if we except the passage up a

terrace leading diagonally across the face from left to right, not unlike a reversed Jack's Rake on Pavey Ark.

Future climbers, thirsting for fresh ascents, and yearning to shine in the pages of their club journal, will here find much to interest them, and the remoteness of the locality will relieve their accounts from that close scrutiny and correction so dear to the heart of the reader of climbing literature.

CHAPTER XVII

CHIEFLY HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL

THE Coolin exercise an influence upon those who have once visited them which is quite unlike that exerted by any other of our home mountains. The hills of Wales and Lakeland, to instance two familiar groups, are so familiar and lie so near the doors of civilisation that most mountaineers take them, as it were, for granted, and do not pause to wonder how they were first discovered, or who gave them the names by which they are known. There is, however, something about the Coolin, their remoteness from popular centres, their loneliness and savage grandeur, added to their compactness, that causes climbers to take an interest in them more extensive than that merely of the rock-climbing they provide.

There are those, even in these enlightened times, who look upon climbers as men with only one idea concerning mountains, and that a restless, hurried inquiry after the steep places, followed by the eternal queries, "Have they been done?" and "Will they go?" That the ranks of climbers contain men who are climbers, and nothing more, is not to be denied, but they are in a very small minority. Much the greater number not only take an interest in the mountains amongst which they find so much health and physical enjoyment, but they appreciate their

beauty and like to read everything intimately connected with them.

For this reason I feel sure that a chapter upon the history and topography of the Coolin, with other incidental items of interest, will be welcomed by the majority of those who read this book.

Handed down from time immemorial is a certain legend relating to the Coolin, which possesses the more interest in that it contains what was for long considered the correct reason of their name.

The legend runs somewhat to the effect that the son of one of the Irish kings of long ago, named Cuchulain, came to Skye to be trained in the hardships of military service. It seems that it was a common practice for the sons of royalty to be sent to this lonely island to learn the art of war, and that, at the end of a certain lapse of time, they were required to walk across what was called "the bridge of cliffs" in order to see if the progress they had made were satisfactory. The "bridge of cliffs" is supposed to be a certain part of the ridge of the Coolin. It is set out in the legend as being "as narrow as the hair of one's head, and as slippery as an eel of the river, and as steep and high as the mast of a ship." A ridge conforming to all these requirements would be difficult to find even amongst the Coolin. And only in a legend could have been found the man to walk across such a place. However, Cuchulain is credited with having done it at his first attempt, and the onlookers were so impressed with his agility that they did him the great honour of calling the ridge after him.

This pretty little story is somewhat reminiscent of the one commonly accepted about Cader Idris. But whereas Cader Idris is still popularly supposed to be so called because it was the chair of the legendary giant Idris, we have the assurance of such an authority on all that pertains to Skye as the late Sheriff Nicolson that the Coolin were not called after Cuchulain. Writing in *Good Words* for 1875 he says: "It has become the fashion to call these the Cuchullin hills. . . . But the native name is *The Coolin* without any addition, like the Caucasus, the Balkans, the Himalaya. The Gaelic name is A'Chuilionn, pronounced 'Coolyun,' which has the advantage of being easier to say than Cuchullin, there being some people that cannot sound the *ch* who inevitably call these mountains the Cuckoolin or Cutchullin."

These people are still in evidence, and it is amusing to hear the more modest of them begin a reference to the Coolin by saying "Cutchoo—or is it Cuckoolin?" They will be relieved to know that it is neither! Probably Sir Walter Scott is responsible to a great extent for the popular wrong naming of the Coolin, but he evidently doubts his own assertion.[1] Sheriff Nicolson also leaves a record to the effect that the oldest Skyemen of his time knew these mountains only as the Coolin and would have none of the legend.

The English translation of A'Chuilionn, or its corruption the Coolin, signifies roughly "the hills of the holly-trees." Exactly why they should be likened to holly-trees I have been unable to ascertain. It may be by reason of the rough, prickly

[1] See "Lord of the Isles," Canto iii., verse 16.

texture of their rock, or because of their serrated and irregular skyline. Either of these reasons will no doubt commend themselves more agreeably to present-day visitors than the improbabilities of the old legend, however delightful the latter may seem in the eyes of an antiquarian or poet.

In this connection it is perhaps worthy of mention that amongst the older Cymric countrymen the word "Coolin" is sometimes used to describe waste things or barren places. On the island of Rum also, this meaning of the word is not unknown to the older inhabitants; but in Skye, as far as I have been able to discover, it is used only as the name of the mountains.

To the crofter who dwells at their foot they have no value, however, and it is conceivable that long ago the use of the word was quite general and that the present-day name has been handed down from the time when men, in their well-known aversion to the mountains, referred to them in the Celtic tongue as the waste, barren places.

The earliest literary notice I have been able to discover that mentions the Coolin is by Dean Munro, in 1549. In his description of the island he says that it possesses "maney woods, maney forrests, maney deire, fair hunting games, maney grate hills principally Cuilluelum[1] and Glannock."[2]

This was written above three hundred years ago, and it still holds true in every detail.

There are several other references by well-known men who visited Skye in the early days, but, beyond a mere mention of the mountains, little of interest to the mountaineer is to be

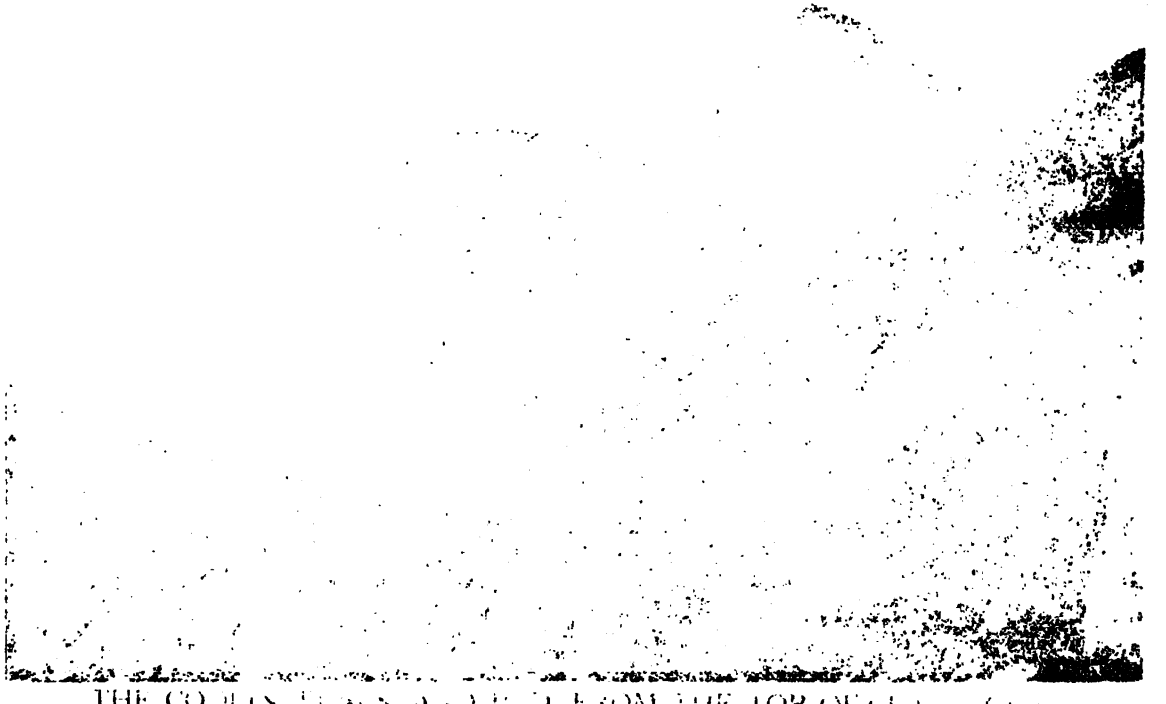
[1] The Coolin. [2] Glamaig.

found in them. However, Prince Charlie's exploit when he "in the night time happened to fall into a bogue almost to the top of the thighs, and Macleod behoved to pull him out by the armpits and thereby was bogued himself," will evoke the sympathy of others who have come Skyeward since his time and been "bogued."

Dr. Johnson visited the island in 1773, but those who remember his remark that to "climb steeps is now very laborious, and to descend them dangerous," will recognise the fact that his was not the spirit of the climber. His personality and tastes tended more to Fleet Street than in the direction of "laborious steeps."

His doings are chronicled by his faithful admirer Boswell in "A Tour to the Hebrides," but in this there is only one reference to the mountains. His description of the view from near Ulinish mentions "the Cuillin, a prodigious range of mountains, capped with rocky pinnacles in a strange variety of shapes. They resemble the mountains near Cortè in Corsica and make part of a great range for deer, which, though entirely devoid of trees, is in these countries called a *forest*."

Dr. Johnson had one thing in common with most of those who have succeeded him, however, and that was the usual grumble at the weather. He says: "It is not pleasing. Half the year is deluged with rain." He may be right. It has not been my good fortune to spend a whole year there to see, but I must



THE CO[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] FROM THE TOP OF [illegible]

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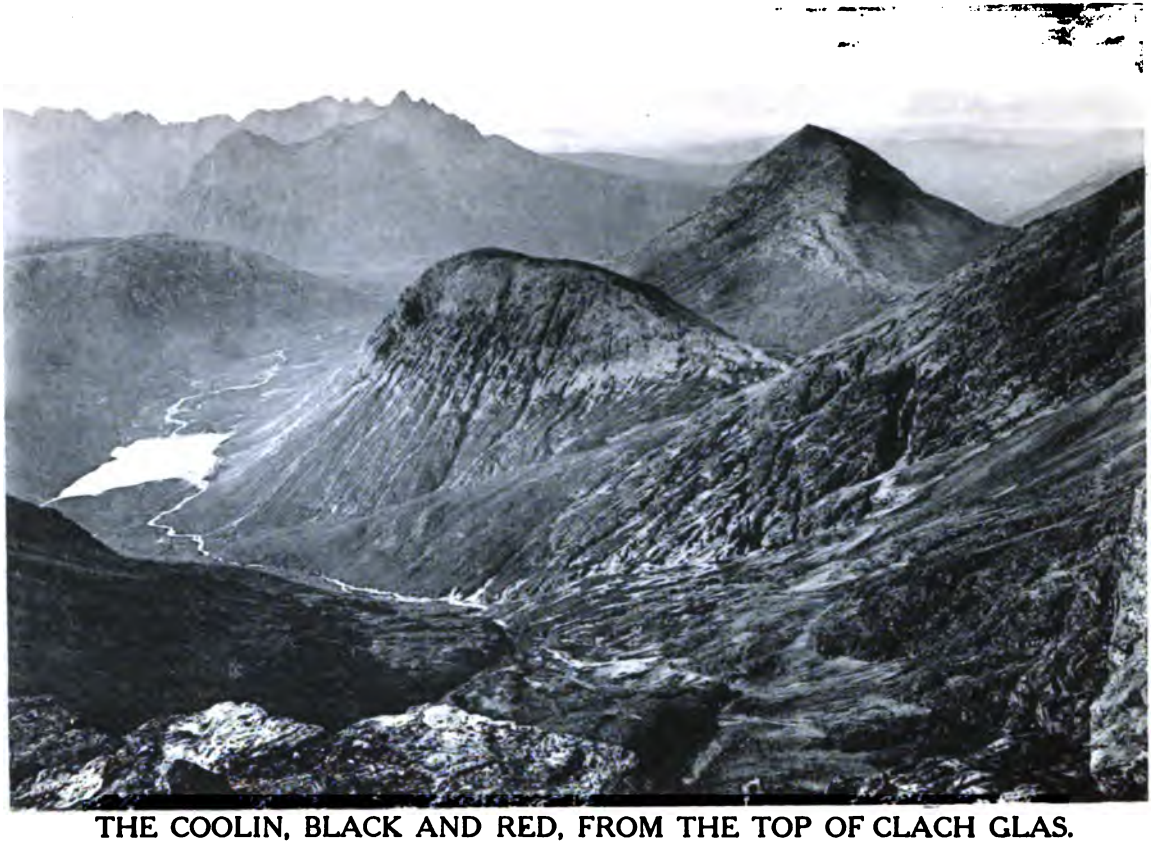

THE COOLIN, BLACK AND RED, FROM THE TOP OF CLACH GLAS.

say that personally I have been favoured with better weather in Skye than in any other mountainous district. Weather amongst mountains should be spoken of as one finds it, and I am glad to say a cheery word for that of Skye. People who have done likewise are, alas! difficult to find. An exception amongst them is Mr. Charles Pilkington, who, during his various visits there, only experienced four hours of rain. He describes Skye as the "driest place in the British Isles," and waxes plaintive over "the dried-up streams and blue sky."

John MacCulloch, M.D., travelled in Skye between the years 1811 and 1821. He says that bad weather prevented him from rendering the service he desired in giving the heights of the various peaks. He made seven attempts "to ascend the Cuchullin Hills." It seems rather unfair to ascribe all his failures to the weather. No doubt there were other reasons. Perhaps they are to be found underlying his fanciful description of Coruisk, and the awed frame of mind this evinces.

He had sailed into Loch Scavaig and walked up to the outlet of the loch. "The name of this extraordinary place is Coruisk, the water of the hollow or the hollow of the water, I know not which. . . . So suddenly and unexpectedly does this strange scene break on the view, so unlike is it to the sea-bay without, so dissimilar to all other scenery, and so little to be foreseen in a narrow insulated spot like Skye, that I felt as if transported by some magician into the enchanted wilds of an Arabian

tale, carried to the habitation of Genii among the mysterious recesses of the Caucasus, . . ." and so on.

This is hardly the language of the man who wishes to penetrate to the loneliest spots in the corries, or undergo the fatigue and hardship of climbing the Coolin in wet weather. The above extract is taken from his "Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland" (vol. iii. p. 473), which contains many detailed and voluminous accounts of his wanderings and observations.

In somewhat the same strain is the account of Sir Walter Scott, who visited Loch Coruisk in 1814, but his description of the spot strikes me as being much more beautiful and effective than that of most of his contemporaries. Although it is not an entirely correct description of the loch and surrounding mountains, it is word-painting of an order in keeping with some of his classical works, and conveys the spirit and feeling of Coruisk as only the pen of such a master can. It is to be found, with context, in notes to "Lord of the Isles": "Scott's Poetical Works," vol. iii., under date August 25, 1814.

His boat entered Loch Scavaig, but, being uncertain up what inlet Coruisk lay, he called at Camasunary, where the "honest man" of the house, "being jealous of the honour of his own loch," directed them to Loch na Créitheach.

Scott felt sure on seeing it that this could not be what he was after, so retraced his steps to the boat, and then pulled round the headland.

His description is taken up at the point where

his party disembarked at the mouth of the stream running out of Loch Coruisk, now known as Scavaig River. "Advancing up this huddling and riotous brook, we found ourselves in a most extraordinary scene; we lost sight of the sea almost immediately after we had climbed over a low ridge of crags, and were surrounded by mountains of naked rock, of the boldest and most precipitous character. The ground on which we walked was the margin of a lake, which seemed to have sustained the constant ravage of torrents from these rude neighbours. The shores consisted of huge strata of naked granite, here and there intermixed with bogs, and heaps of gravel and sand piled in the empty water-courses. Vegetation there was little or none; and the mountains rose so perpendicularly from the water edge, that Borrowdale, or even Glencoe, is a jest to them. We proceeded a mile and a half up this deep, dark, and solitary lake, which was about two miles long, half a mile broad, and is, as we learned, of extreme depth. The murky vapours which enveloped the mountain ridges obliged us by assuming a thousand varied shapes, changing their drapery into all sorts of forms, and sometimes clearing off altogether. It is true, the mist made us pay the penalty by some heavy and downright showers, from the frequency of which, a Highland boy, whom we had brought from the farm, told us the lake was popularly called the Water-kettle. . . . It is as exquisite a savage scene as Loch Katrine is a scene of romantic beauty. After having penetrated so far as distinctly to observe the termination of the lake,

under an immense precipice, which rises abruptly from the water, we returned and often stopped to admire the ravages which storms must have made in these recesses, where all human witnesses were driven to places of more shelter and security. Stones, or rather large masses and fragments of rocks of a composite kind, perfectly differing from the strata of the lake, were scattered upon the bare rocky beach, in the strangest and most precarious situations, as if abandoned by the torrents which had borne them down from above. Some lay loose and tottering upon the ledges of the natural rock, with so little security, that the slightest push moved them, though their weight might exceed many tons. These detached rocks, or stones, were chiefly what are called plum-pudding stones. The bare rocks, which formed the shore of the lakes, were a species of granite. The opposite side of the lake seemed quite pathless and inaccessible, as a huge mountain, one of the detached ridges of the Cuillen hills, sinks in a profound and perpendicular precipice down to the water. On the left-hand side, which we traversed, rose an higher and equally inaccessible mountain, the top of which strongly resembled the shivered crater of an exhausted volcano. I never saw a spot in which there was less appearance of vegetation of any kind. The eye rested on nothing but barren and naked crags, and the rocks on which we walked by the side of the loch were as bare as the pavements of Cheapside. There are one or two small islets in the loch, which seem to bear juniper, or some such low bushy shrub. Upon the whole, though I have

seen many scenes of more extensive desolation, I never witnessed any in which it pressed more deeply upon the eye and the heart than at Loch Corisken, at the same time that its grandeur elevated and redeemed it from the wild and dreary character of utter barrenness."

Principal J. D. Forbes was the first climber to visit the Coolin, and his now classical ascent of Sgurr nan Gillean marked the first step in their exploitation. In his "Geology of the Cuchullin Hills" is to be found the account of this. It is given verbatim on p. 2 of the present book.

He was chiefly interested in the traces of the glacial action so evident in Skye, but, finding no reliable map of the district, he also devoted a good deal of time to rectifying the omission. The outcome of his observations is the map reproduced in Black's "Guide to the Isle of Skye," 1854, and this Mr. W. Douglas, editor of the *Scottish Mountaineering Journal*, pronounces to be "wonderfully correct."

To have produced so good a map his knowledge of the Coolin must have been pretty extensive, but he leaves no record of having been to any of their summits except those of Sgurr nan Gillean and Bruach na Frithe.

The latter he ascended in May 1845, and followed it by making a fresh route up Sgurr nan Gillean. His account is as follows: "In 1843, I was in Skye with a barometer, but had not an opportunity of revisiting the Cuchullins; but in May 1845, I ascended the lower summit, nearly adjoining, marked Bruch-na-Fray in the map, and wishing to ascertain the difference of the

height of Scuir-na-Gillean, I proposed to Macintyre to try to ascend it from the west side. It was no sooner proposed than attempted. It was impossible to do otherwise than descend deep into the rugged ravine of Loat-e-Corry, which separates them, which cost us a severe scramble, and then face an ascent, which from a distance appeared almost perpendicular; but, aided by the quality of the rocks already mentioned, we gained the Scuir-na-Gillean from the west side, although, on reaching the top, and looking back, it appeared like a dizzy precipice." His barometrical observations on this occasion were rendered useless by a sudden fall in the "glass" during the time he was absent from Sligachan, but he subsequently obtained what he considered a satisfactory reading, and says, "it is probable that the true height of Scuir-na-Gillean is between 3200 and 3220 feet. Bruch-na-Fray is probably about 40 feet lower." A reference to the last Ordnance Survey measurements shows Sgurr nan Gillean to be 3167 feet high, and Bruach na Frithe 3143 feet.

From 1845 until 1859 the Coolin were apparently not visited by climbers, but in the latter year Mr. C. R. Weld, then a member of the Alpine Club, climbed Sgurr na Stri. His description of the view from the top and his taunt to his fellow-members are not without interest to climbers. "Now, turning to the north, and sweeping the horizon from east to west, what do we see? Peaks and pinnacles, jagged crests and fantastic outlines; a wilderness of weird shapes, dark, solemn, and awful. Giant Sgor-na-Gillian is there, the monarch of the Cuchullins; and

hear it, brother members of the Alpine Club, another peak a little to the south, laid down by enterprising Captain Wood on the Admiralty chart as being 3212 feet high and *inaccessible*. At a recent meeting of this club the excellent president drew the attention of the members to certain peaks of continental mountains deemed inaccessible, but here, according to the Admiralty surveyor, is one in the British Islands never trodden by the foot of man. Surely some bold member of the Club will scale this Skye peak ere long, and tell us that it was but a stroll before breakfast."

His challenge was long in being taken up, for it was not until twenty-one years later that Messrs. Pilkington made the first ascent. Times have changed since then. Twenty-one hours would barely elapse nowadays before some "bold member" or other would take advantage of such a piece of news.

After Mr. Weld's visit and the publication in 1860 of his "Two Months in the Highlands," from which the above extract is taken, nothing of especial interest to climbers appeared, until Sheriff Nicolson's well-known articles in *Good Words* for 1875 showed to an ignorant world what manner of mountains his birthplace boasted.

The most interesting extracts from these are quoted in the course of the various chapters in the present book, but his name and writings are so interwoven with the history of the Coolin that it seems fitting that an account, necessarily brief, of his personality and career should find a place in this chapter.

Alexander Nicolson was born in September 1827, at Usabont, in Skye, where he spent practically the whole of his time, being educated privately until he went to the University of Edinburgh. Here his great natural gifts gave promise of a brilliant career, but for some reason or other this promise was never wholly fulfilled.

After taking his degree, his thoughts turned to theology for a while; underlying all his writings on Skye and the Coolin is a strong reverence of soul that causes one to think that perhaps his first impulse was the right one. But literature fascinated him, and soon after taking his degree he became one of the staff of the *Edinburgh Guardian*. Thereafter he edited the *Daily Express*, until it merged into the *Caledonian Mercury*. Then came another change in his plans, and he was called to the Scottish Bar; but his career as an advocate was not a success. Whether he lacked ability in this line or not cannot be said, for he had not the good fortune to have cases entrusted to him. It led indirectly, however, to his being offered and accepting the office of Sheriff-Substitute of Kirkcudbright. This was in 1872, and it is as Sheriff Nicolson that he is now best remembered. It was chiefly about this time that he visited the island and mountains of his youth, writing for contemporary magazines and newspapers the articles which have endeared him to all who visit the Coolin.

He afterwards went to Greenock, where he continued until the completion of twenty years' shrievalty. Shortly after this he retired on a pension, and greatly delighted his old Edinburgh

friends by his return to their midst. His health was more or less broken, however, and on January 13, 1893, in his sixty-sixth year, he passed away.

Such is a short and necessarily inadequate résumé of the life of the man who has probably done more than any other to bring his native mountains to our knowledge. Those who felt disappointment at the scantiness of his literary achievements are solaced by the memory of his genial and clever personality, his wit and singular charm of manner, and his whole-hearted love of the Coolin. Perhaps his friends expected too much of him. For a great part of his life it needed all his resource to make both ends meet, and when a man is eking out a more or less precarious livelihood by reporting, it is somewhat apt to sap the best that is in him.

But had he left to Coolin lovers nothing more than his verses on the Isle of Skye,[1] they would be greatly his debtors, for by reason of these alone his name would be remembered and honoured as long as his favourite peak towers above lonely Corrie Lagan.

Some of the older mountaineers of the present day were almost contemporary with Sheriff Nicolson. Only five years after he climbed Sgurr Dubh, Messrs. Charles and Laurence Pilkington scaled the "Inaccessible" Pinnacle of Sgurr Dearg. From that time, 1880, until the present day, the records of the climbers, headed by those of the giants of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, are briefly mentioned in the present volume.

[1] "Verses by Alexander Nicolson, LL.D.," (David Douglas, Edinburgh).

Although these exploits are many and various, and no virgin peaks now await the cragsman, dozens of good rock-climbs still remain to be accomplished. And there are grand traditions to be kept unsullied; tales of great and difficult climbs carried through without accident or reproach; of glorious days on the mountains that have brought health, strength, and beautiful memories to many who are now retiring and handing over their "playground" to other and younger men. Let these cherish it well, and treat it with the respect it merits! Let them not think that because its peaks are of mean altitude and its rocks of ideal roughness that it can be held lightly! When the summits are glazed with ice, and the snowflakes chase one another over the ridges from the Thunderer to Coruisk, let them remember that these are real mountains and not mere hills to be scaled with impunity!

The careful, appreciative climber the Coolin welcome gladly. To him their shattered summits, jagged ridges, and gaunt black crags sweeping down to their brown base of sea-bordered moorland, are a constant source of wonder and pleasure; the joys they confer are amongst the best things this world affords. To him the greatest of their bards has sung—

"Lovest thou mountains great,
Peaks to the clouds that soar,
Corrie and fell where eagles dwell
And cataracts dash evermore?
Lovest thou green, grassy glades,
By the sunshine sweetly kist,
Murmuring waves and echoing caves,
Then go to the Isle of Mist!"

TABLE OF PRONUNCIATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

I AM indebted to Mr. Colin B. Phillip for the following table of pronunciations and meanings of the place-names occurring in the text.

Mr. Phillip points out that in many cases it is impossible to give a proper phonetic rendering of the names, because in Gaelic several of the letters have values and sounds which are peculiar to that language. I have, however, submitted the list to several people who are quite strangers to Skye and the Coolin, and their pronunciation of the names as rendered below approximates very nearly to that of the natives.

It will be noticed that the accent, in almost every case, is upon the first syllable. The sound of the *ch* is as in the Scotch word "loch"; the sound of the *a*, where accented, being as in the word "far."

NAME.	PRONUNCIATION.	TRANSLATION.
A'Chioch	*A Heeoch*	The Pap.
Am Basteir	*Um Bàsiter*	The Executioner.
An Caisteal	*Un Càstil*	The Castle.
An Diallaid	*Un Jèladge*	The Saddle.
An Dorus	*An Dòrus*	The Door.
An Garbh-choire . . .	*An Garra Horrie* . . .	The Rough Corrie.
An Stac	*Un Stakk*	The Stack.
Bealach na Glaic Moire .	*Byellach na Glakk More* .	The Pass of the Great Hollow.
Bealach a'Mhaim . . .	*Byellach a' Vyme*	The Pass of the Round Hill.
Bidein Druim nan Ramh	*Bèdyun Dreem na Ràav* .	The Peaks of the Ridge of Oars.
Blaven	*Blàven*	The Mountain of Bloom.
Bruach na Frithe . . .	*Brùach na Free*	The Brae of the Forest.
Clach Glas	*Clach Glas*	The Grey Stone.
Coir a'Ghrundda . . .	*Corrie a'Hròonda* . . .	The Floor Corrie.
Coireachan Ruadha . .	*Còreachan Ròoah* . . .	The Red Corries.
Coire na Creiche . . .	*Corrie na Creech* . . .	The Corrie of the Spoil.
Coire Lagan	*Corrie Làggan*	Corrie of the Hollows.

NAME.	PRONUNCIATION.	TRANSLATION
Coire an Uaigneis	*Corrie an Òoagnish*	Corrie of Solitude.
Coir'uisg	*Còrooisk*	The Watery Corrie.
Coruisk	*Còrooisk*	The Water Cauldron (popularly pronounced *Corbusk*).
Fionn Choire	*Fhoon Horrie*	The Fair Corrie.
Gars-bheinn	*Gàrsven*	The Smoking Mountain.
Loch an Athain	*Lochan Anàan*	The Loch of the Ford.
Loch an'Fhir-bhallaich	*Lochan Heerâllich*	The Loch of the Spotted Folk.
Ruadha Stac	*Rôoah Stâhk*	The Red Stack.
Sgurr Alasdair	*Skoor A'laster*	Alexander's Peak.
Sgurr na Banachdich	*Skoor na Bànnachdich*	The Small-pox Peak.
Sgurr Beag	*Skoor Beg*	The Little Peak.
Sgurr a'Bhasteir	*Skoor a Vhàsiter*	The Executioner's Peak.
Sgurr a'Choire Bhig	*Skoor a'Horrie Vick*	The Peak of the Little Corrie.
Sgurr Coire an Lochain	*Skoor Corr an Lòchan*	The Peak of the Corrie of the Little Loch.
Sgurr Dearg	*Skoor Jèrrack*	The Red Peak.
Sgurr Dubh	*Skoor Doo*	The Black Peak.
Sgurr Dubh an Da Bheinn	*Skoor Doo na Dâven*	The Black Peak between two hills.
Sgurr nan Eag	*Skoor nan Yeck*	The Notched Peak.
Sgurr an Fheadain	*Skoor an Aityan*	The Peak of the Pipes or Chanters.
Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh	*Skoor a'Hreeta*	The Peak of Running Water (?) (popularly pronounced *Greeta*).
Sgurr nan Gillean	*Skoor nan Gillyen*	The Peak of the Young Men; (*Norsk*) The Peak of the Ghylls.
Sgurr nan Gobhar	*Skoor nan Gòwer*	The Peak of the Goats.
Sgurr a'Mhadaidh	*Skoor a Vàtee*	The Foxes' Peak.
Sgurr Mhic Choinnich	*Skoor Vick Hòinnich*	Mackenzie's Peak.
Sgurr Sgumain	*Skoor Skoòman*	The Stack Peak.
Sgurr na Stri	*Skoor na Stree*	The Peak of Strife.
Sgurr Tearlach	*Skoor Cheèrlach*	Charles' Peak.
Sgurr Thormaid	*Skoor Hòrromadg*	Norman's Peak.
Sgurr Thuilm	*Skoor Hoôlim*	Peak of Tulm.
Sgurr na h'Uamha	*Skoor na Hoôa*	Peak of the Caves.
Sligachan	*Sleegachan*	The Shell Beach.
Sron na Ciche	*Stron na Keèchа*	Promontory of the Pap.
Tairneilear	*Tàrneler*	The Thunderer.

A SHORT GLOSSARY
OF MOUNTAINEERING TERMS

PREPARED FOR THE USE OF NON-CLIMBING READERS

Anchorage.—A safe position where one climber can, if necessary, support the weight of the next man by holding the rope.

Arête.—A sharp ridge of rock leading to a summit; often used in expressing an ascent up the exposed outside edge of a buttress or pinnacle.

Avalanche.—A mass of débris—snow, ice, or rocks—falling from the higher parts of a mountain.

Backing-up.—A method of ascending chimneys by placing the back on one side, and the knees or feet on the other, according to the width of the cleft (see lower figure in plate facing p. 116); also used to define the help given to a leader by the second climber following up close behind him as a support.

Bealach.—A pass—generally the lowest part of a ridge connecting two peaks.

Belay.—To pass the rope round a knob of rock, and thus safeguard the next climber.

Belaying-pin, Belay.—An outstanding knob of rock round which the rope can be passed for greater safety.

Cairn.—A heap of stones.

Chimney.—A steep and narrow rift in the rocks, roughly resembling a household chimney with one side removed.

Chock-stone.—A mass of rock, or a stone, that has fallen and become wedged between the walls of a chimney, gully, or crack.

Col.—*See* Bealach.

Coire, Corrie.—A hollow in the side of a mountain; a small valley, generally more or less surrounded by mountains.

Combined Tactics.—An expression variously used when the second man helps the leader by shoving him or giving him a shoulder or other assistance.

Couloir.—A steep, wide gully in rock, ice, or snow.

Crack.—A rift in the rocks, narrower than a chimney.

Crevasse.—A fissure in a glacier or snowfield.

Gendarme.—Alpine parlance for a tower or pinnacle of rock on a ridge.

Glazed Rocks.—Rocks covered with a film of ice.

Glissade.—A method of descending by sliding down snow-slopes, either standing or in a sitting position.

Gully.—A wide or narrow ravine cleaving the face of a precipice or steep mountain side.

Hand-traverse.—To move horizontally along a face of rock supported only by the hands.

Hitch.—*See* Belaying-pin.

Jammed Stone.—*See* Chock-stone.

Kletterschuhe.—Shoes with hempen soles, chiefly used for climbing in the Dolomites.

Knife-edge.—A very narrow ridge of rock.

Lochan.—A small loch or lake.

Moraine.—Stones and débris left by a glacier.

Nose.—A buttress of rock, generally slightly overhanging, or very steep in its lower part.

Pitch.—A comparatively short, steep rise in the rock-bed of a gully, often crowned by a chock-stone. Used widely to define any serious difficulty met with on a climb.

Platform.—A small, comparatively level place on steep rocks.

Pounded.—Reached a place where it is impossible to advance or retreat.

Rake.—A natural rock-passage running across a steep precipice.

Rücksack.—A loosely made bag supported on the back by leather bands over the shoulders.

Screes.—Loose slopes of rocks or stones.

Sgurr.—A sharp, rocky mountain peak.

Shoulder, giving a.—A method of assisting a member of a party by allowing him to stand on a companion's shoulder to reach a higher hold.

Slack.—The loose rope between two climbers.

Through-route.—The way up a chimney or gully behind a chock-stone; the hole between a jammed stone and the bed of the gully.

Traverse.—A more or less horizontal passage across rocks, ice, or snow on a mountain side; used also to define a climb up one side of a peak or pinnacle and down the other.

Wall.—A steep cliff of rock, ice, or snow.

INDEX

A

Alldearg House, 3, 7
Alpine Journal (quoted), 92, 194, 211, 270, 271, 293
Am Basteir, 2, 68–71, 93
An Caisteal, 277–279
An Diallaid, 152
An Dorus, 124, 171
An Stac, 192, 204

B

Banachdich Gully, 152, 156–157
" " Walls of, 152–157
Barlow, Dr. G. D., 240, 266
Bartrum, Mr. Geoffrey, 127, 130, 131, 137
Bealach a'Bhasteir, 18, 19
Bealach a'Garbh Choire, 282
Bealach a'Mhaim, 108, 118, 130, 277
Bealach Coire na Banachdich, 158
Bealach Coir a'Ghrundda, 282
Bealach Coire Lagan, 192, 204
Bealach Coir' an Lochain, 227, 228
Bealach na Glaic Moire, 99, 124, 128
Bealach nan Lice, 72
Beecroft, Mr. C. T. C., 60
Ben Lomond, 213
Ben Nevis, 52, 272
Bhasteir Corrie, 5, 7, 18, 24, 25, 52, 53, 71
Bhasteir Gorge, 7, 86–89
Bhasteir Nick Gully, 32, 73–77, 83
Bhasteir Tooth, 31, 32, 69, 70, 71–89
" " North Chimney, 82–86
" " South Face Climb, 77–81
Bidein Druim nan Ramh, 90–103
Binns, Mr. A. H., 25, 27, 28, 33, 107, 117, 127, 131, 137, 185, 189
Black Chimney, Sgurr nan Gillean, 42–49
Blackwood's Magazine (quoted), 55
Blaven, 141, 272, 284–287, 294–299
" Pinnacle Ridge, 297–299
Bloody Stone, 95–96, 103, 165, 273
"Boiler-plates," 206, 301
Bowron, Mr. H. E., 64, 260

Boswell (quoted), 308
Broadford, 287
Brown, the late Mr. W., 150; (quoted), 206
Bruach na Frithe, 93, 276–277

C

Cader Idris, 306
Camping in Skye, 128–129, 217–218
Cioch, the, 233, 235–241, 253
Clach Glas, 272, 287–295
" Arch Gully, 291
" Consolation Gully, 299–301
" East Face, 302
" First Ascent, 293–294
" West Face, 301–302
Clach Glas-Blaven *col*, 294
Clark, Dr. Inglis, 305, 306
Climbers' Book at Sligachan (quoted), 105
Coir' a'Ghreadaidh, 142, 152, 174
Coir' a'Ghrundda, 208, 226, 282
Coir' a'Mhadaidh, 91, 100, 124, 277
Coir' an Eich, 152
Coir' an Lochain, 226, 227
Coire Dubh, 288, 294, 299, 301
Coire Lagan, 177, 180, 191, 208, 209, 232
Coire Riabhach, 41, 52, 90
Coire na Banachdich, 151, 152
Coire na Creiche, 91, 99, 104, 123, 124, 130, 172
Coire nan Allt Geala, 3
Coire Tairneilear, 91, 123, 124, 171
Coire Uaigneis, 150, 166, 167
Coir-'uisg, 90, 281
Collie, Professor J. N., 41, 49, 69, 145, 151, 157, 163, 183, 206, 215, 235, 259, 264
Collie Step, Moss Ghyll, Scawfell, 133
Collier, the late Joseph, 29
Coniston Old Man, 175
Coreachan Ruadha, 152, 205
Cuchulain, 305, 306

D

Deep Chimney, Sgurr nan Gillean, 53, 57–60
Deep Gash Gully, 126
Deep Ghyll, Scawfell, 5
Dent, Mr. C. T. (quoted), 86–89, 162
Doctor's Chimney, 54, 61
Dom, The, 231
Douglas, Mr. W., 163, 313
Druim Hain, 217, 270
Druim nan Ramh, 90, 165

E

Eagle's Nest Arête, Great Gable, 35
" " Crag, 66–67
" " Ridge, 7
Elbruz, 208

F

Fionn Choire, 70, 71
First Pinnacle, Sgurr nan Gillean, 7, 41–52
Forbes, Professor J. D., 2, 3, 152, 313
Forked Chimney, Sgurr nan Gillean, 53, 54–57
Forked Gully, Sgurr nan Gillean, 49
Fourth Pinnacle, Sgurr nan Gillean, 7, 62–64
Foxes' Rake, 125, 135, 149

G

Garbh-bheinn, 302
Gars-bheinn, 283
Gendarme, the, 16, 17, 19, 54, 61, 62
Gharbh Choire, 279, 281
Ghreadaidh-Mhadaidh *col*, 124, 171
Gibbs, Mr. G. Bennett, 83, 126
" quoted, 126, 173
Glamaig, 52, 66
Glen Brittle, 124, 161, 184, 196, 205, 216, 217, 218
" accommodation at, 237
Glen Sligachan, 7, 18, 95, 165, 271, 285
Golden eagle, 44, 289
Great Gable, 208
Gully between First and Second Pinnacles, Sgurr nan Gillean, 39
Gully between Second and Third Pinnacles, Sgurr nan Gillean, 29–31
Gully between Third Pinnacle and Knight's Peak, 64–66
Gully between Knight's Peak and Sgurr nan Gillean, 32

H

Hallitt, Mr. A. W., 105, 114
Harland, Mr. H., 25, 27, 28, 32, 34, 35, 36, 45, 46, 51, 107, 109, 110, 114, 127, 128, 130, 154, 155, 185, 242, 243, 244, 246, 248, 249
Hart, Mr. J. C., 193
Harta Corrie, 18, 62, 90, 95, 96, 100, 270, 271
Hastings, Mr. G., 39, 86
Heap, Mr. W., 64
Heddle, the late Professor, 174
Heelis, Mr., 92, 193
Hopkinson, Mr. E., 39, 86
Hornby, Dr. J. J., 179
Howell, Mr. W. P., 41, 49, 145, 163, 206, 215
Hulton, Mr. E., 91

I

"Inaccessible" Pinnacle, 161, 174–191
" " Eastern Ascent, 179–181
" " Southern Crack, 184–191
" " Western Ascent, 181–184
Intermediate Gully, Dow Crags, 135

J

Jammed Block Chimney, Sgurr nan Gillean, 54, 60–61
Johnson, Dr. Samuel, 308

K

Kelsall, Mr. J., 105, 114
Kern Knotts Crack, 190
King, Mr. W. W., 173, 194
King's Chimney, 194, 204
Knight, Professor W., 10, 14, 16
Knight's Peak, 7, 8, 62–64
" " First Ascent, 10–14

L

Ladies' Pinnacle, Sgurr Sgumain, 263
Lamb, Mr. R., 64
Loch a'Choire Riabhaich, 3
" " near Coruisk, 90
Loch an Athain, 285, 288
Loch an Fhir-bhallaich, 197, 219
Loch Brittle, 184, 231, 232, 265
Loch Coruisk, 2, 90, 99, 100, 123, 165, 166, 168, 180, 206, 281, 282
" " Scott's description of, 310–313
Loch Harport, 129
Loch Lagan, 185, 196, 197, 218, 268
Loch Scavaig, 97, 272, 279, 283
Loch Slapin, 285
Loch Sligachan, 52
Lota Corrie, 18, 70, 71, 78, 79, 96, 273

M

Macculloch, Dr. J. (quoted), 309, 310
Macdonald, Lord, 2
Mackenzie, John, 54, 62, 69, 174, 183, 193, 194, 195, 206
Maclaren, Mr., 83
Matterhorn, 11, 208, 231, 272
Mont Blanc, 231, 272
Monte Rosa, 208
Munro, Dean (quoted), 307

N

Naismith, Mr. W. W., 41, 49, 72, 126, 145, 206, 215, 276, 301
Napes Needle, 176, 235
Nicolson, the late Sheriff Alexander, 11, 13, 177, 183, 191, 282, 315, 316–317
" " " quoted, 18, 100, 209, 279, 318
Nicolson's Chimney, 18, 54, 62
North Chimney, Bhasteir Tooth, 82–86
North-west Buttress, Sgurr a'Mhadaidh, 125, 145–149

O

Old Man of Skye, 175, 177
Outer Hebrides, 38, 100

P

Parallel Chimneys, 50, 51
Parker, Mr. J. A., 64, 145, 178, 276, 301
Parkinson, Mr. P. R., 60
Parson's Nose, North Wales, 160
Phillip, Mr. Colin B., 230, 242, 282
" Mrs. Colin B., 238, 264
Pilkington, Mr. Charles, 16, 92, 177, 178, 193, 211, 309, 317
" " quoted, 194, 270, 271, 293, 294
Pilkington, Mr. Laurence, 16, 91, 177, 178, 317
Pillar Rock, 176
Pinnacle Ridge, Sgurr nan Gillean, 2, 5–15, 20, 21
Pinnacle Route, Sgurr nan Gillean, 2, 5–15, 20, 21
Portree, 32, 38, 108, 144
Precipice of Sron na Ciche, 232–263
" " " Central Gully, 253, 259–263
" " " Cioch, 233, 235–241, 253
" " " Cioch, from the Corrie Climb, 241–252
" " " Cioch Gully, 233, 240, 255, 256
" " " Eastern Gully, 253, 256–257, 282
" " " Finger, the, 257–258
" " " Flake, the, 259
" " " Measurement of, 266
" " " Western Gully, 233, 263, 267
Prince Charlie, 308
Prothero, Miss, 238, 264

Q

Quiraing, 144, 145

R

Raeburn, Mr. Harold, 89, 183, 278
Red Hills, 95, 229
Ridge from end to end in twenty-four hours (discussed), 158–159
" Round of Corrie Lagan," 267
Rücksack Club Report (quoted), 64
Ruskin, 175

S

Scawfell Pike, 208
Scawfell Pinnacle, 190
Scott, Sir Walter (quoted), 310–313
Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal (quoted), 18, 62, 126, 206, 215
Shadbolt, Mr. L. G., 83, 126, 143
Sgurr a'Bhasteir, 23, 42, 86
Sgurr a'Fionn Choire, 78, 275–276
Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh, 124, 162–174
" " South-east Face Climb, 163–173
Sgurr Alasdair, 176–177, 205, 208–226
" " First Ascent, 209–210
" " Great Stone Shoot, 191, 197, 216, 221, 222, 223, 226, 229
" " Northern Climb, 220–226
" " North-west Face, 215, 216, 226, 229
Sgurr a'Mhadaidh, 123–150, 171
" " Deep Gash Gully, 126
" " Foxes' Rake, 125, 135, 149
" " North-west Buttress, 125, 145–149
" " South-east Buttress, 149–150, 163
" " Slanting Gully, 125, 127–143
Sgurr an Eadar da Choire, 173
Sgurr an Fheadain, 91
Sgurr a'Coir' an Lochain, 205–207
Sgurr Dearg, 92, 160, 161, 175–179, 197, 208
" " The Window Tower, 160–162
Sgurr Dubh, 226, 279–282
Sgurr Dubh an Da Bheinn, 282
Sgurr Dubh Beag, 281, 282, 283
Sgurr Mhic Choinnich, 192–205, 215
" " " Western Buttress, 196–205
Sgurr na Banachdich, 1, 151–162, 163
Sgurr na h'Uamha, 95, 100, 270–275
Sgurr nan Eag, 283
Sgurr nan Gillean, 1–67, 93, 229, 272, 277, 284
" " Black Chimney, 42–49
" " Deep Chimney, 53, 57–60
" " Doctor's Chimney, 54, 61
" " Eagle's Nest Crag, 66–67
" " First Ascent, 2
" " First Pinnacle, 7, 41–52
" " Forked Chimney, 53, 54–57
" " Forked Gully, 49
" " Fourth Pinnacle, 7, 10, 62–64, 89
" " *Gendarme*, 16, 17, 19, 54, 61, 62
" " Gully between 1st and 2nd Pinnacles, 39
" " Gully between 2nd and 3rd Pinnacles, 29–31
" " Gully between 3rd and 4th Pinnacles, 64–66
" " Gully between Knight's Peak and Sgurr nan Gillean, 32
" " Jammed Block Chimney, 54, 60–61
" " Nicolson's Chimney, 18, 54, 62
" " Parallel Chimneys, 50, 51
" " Pinnacle Ridge, 2, 5–15, 20, 21

Sgurr nan Gillean, Pinnacle Route, 2, 5–15, 20, 21
" " Sligachan Gully, 49–52
" " Third Pinnacle, 7, 23–40
" " "Tourist Route," 3
" " Western Ridge, 16–18, 19
Sgurr nan Gobhar, 152, 162
Sgurr na Stri, 272
Sgurr Sgumain, 211, 232
" " Northern Buttress, 267–269
" " Stone Shoot, 232, 233, 263, 282
" " Western Buttress, 267
Sgurr Tearlach, 192, 205, 209, 215
Sgurr Thormaid, 151
Sgurr Thuilm, 125, 142, 171
Skiddaw, 213
Slade, the Messrs., 107
Snowdon, 163
Sligachan, 1, 2, 3, 13, 41, 66, 93, 99, 103, 118, 161, 163, 213, 214, 216, 217, 241, 261
Slingsby, Mr. W. C., 39, 89, 278
Spur of Sgurr an Fheadain, 120–122
Sron Dearg, 160, 162, 184
Sron na Ciche, Precipice of, 232–263
" " Central Gully, 233, 253, 259–263
" " Cioch, 233, 235–241, 253
" " Cioch from the Corrie Climb, 241–252
" " Cioch Gully, 233, 240, 255, 256
" " Eastern Gully, 253, 256–257, 282
" " Flake, the, 259
" " Finger, the, 257–258
" " Measurement of, 266
" " Western Gully, 233, 263, 267
Steeple, Mr. E. W., 260
Stephen, the late Sir Leslie (quoted), 103, 118
Stocker, Rev. A. H., 64, 178
Stony Corrie, 288
Summit Gully, Sgurr an Fheadain, 122

T

Täschorn, the, 231
Tattersall, Mr. W., 64
Tearlach-Dubh *col*, 228
Tearlach-Dubh Gap, 159, 226–231
Third Pinnacle, Sgurr nan Gillean, 23–40
Thompson, Mr. R. E., 107, 109
Tyndall, Professor, 57
Tooth of Sgurr nan Gillean. See *Gendarme*
"Tourist Route," Sgurr nan Gillean, 3
Tribe, Mr. W. N., 174

U

Uig, 144
Ulinish, 308
Ushba, 208

Y

W

Wakefield, Dr. A. W., 158
Walker, the late Mr. H., 91, 92, 193
Wallace, Dr. A. J., 143, 144, 237, 241
" Mrs. A. J., 143
Walls of Banachdich Gully, 152–157
Wastdale, 5
Waterpipe Gully, 104–120, 190
Weisshorn, 231
Weld, Mr. C. R., 177 ; quoted, 314–315
Western Ridge, Sgurr nan Gillean, 16–18, 19
Williams, the late Mr. Alfred, 213, 214
Window Tower, 160–162
Woodhead, Mr. A. G., 260

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